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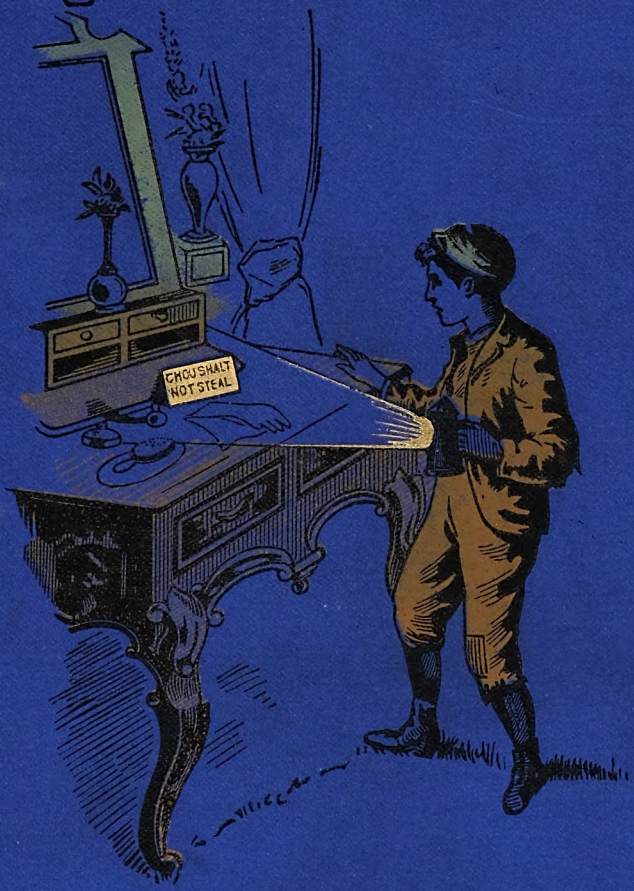

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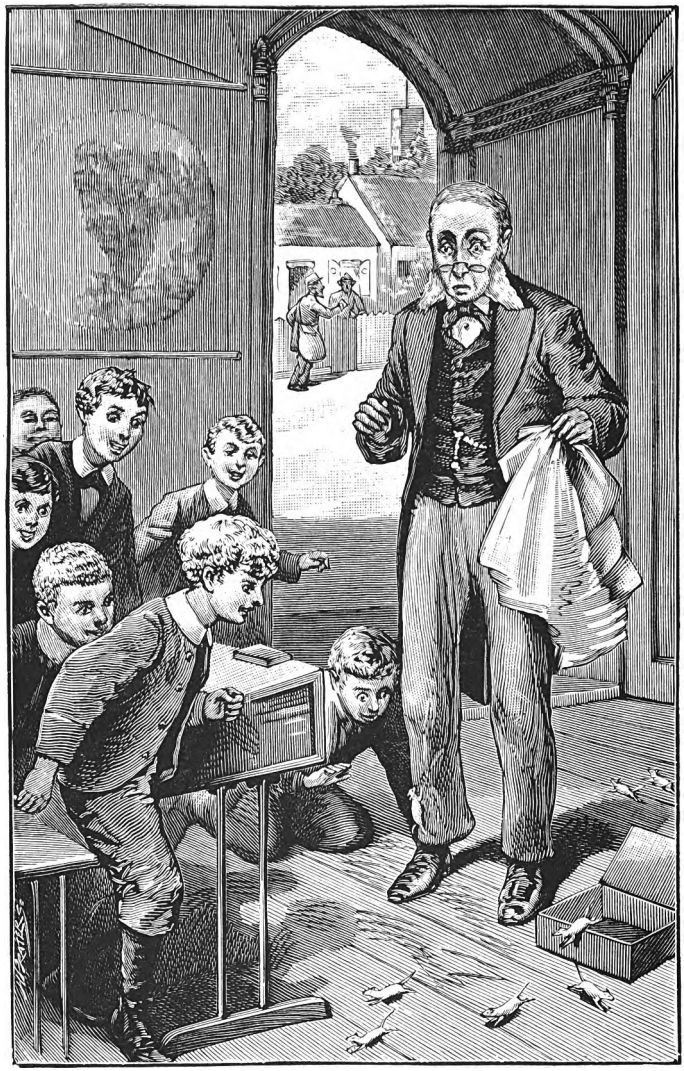

Frontispiece.

"'It's white mice, teacher, and they's runned away!'"—*Page 47.*

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YUPPIE.

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

(MRS. J. A. COMFORT),

Author of "Weasel Tim," "In the Cradle of the North Wind," &c., &c.

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ROBERT CULLEY,

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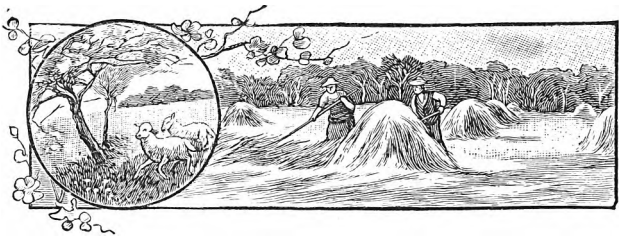

YUPPIE.

CHAPTER I.

EXCITING TIMES.

THE World was waking up. That is, Yuppie's world, which was mostly spelled with a capital W, though a smaller letter sufficed for that inconsiderable portion of the earth beyond the limits of Bodsam Green.

To begin with, the postman had been hopelessly drunk twice in one week, and Bob Hutton, the blacksmith, had to leave his work and carry the mail-bag to Blaydon.

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On the first occasion it was Bob's own fault, he having stood treat to Sam Waller so many times, that, firstly, Sam's head, and finally his legs, had given way under the strain, after which, there was nothing for it but to let him sleep off the effects of his debauch, on a truss of hay in Bentle's barn, whilst some one else did his work for him.

The next time, Sam alone was to blame, he having found a shilling on his way up from Blaydon, and under the mistaken impression that it was the Queen's birthday, drank himself incapable again, his duties devolving, as before, on his unwise friend, the blacksmith.

That second outbreak being unusual, the boys of Bodsam regarded it in the light of a historical event, and chalked a record of it on the black doors of Bentle's barn.

Yuppie crawled so far, in order to see the process of chalking up, and also to get a glimpse of Sam's bloated red face, as he lay prone on the hay, breathing heavily. He had seen his own father drunk more times than he could count, and many of the

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neighbours too, but this was the first time he had seen any one in a drunken sleep, his ideas of inebriation being associated with wild uproariousness, and much song-singing, and fighting.

He was greatly interested in the spectacle, and gazed at the unconscious man with the same vivid curiosity which he brought to bear on all things out of the common, with which he came in contact.

His name was not really Yuppie, but Arthur John Bowles, but as almost every one living at Bodsam Green had a nickname, it was only natural that he should have one too. His father was known as Skittle Bowles, to distinguish him from Birdy Bowles, the poacher.

Yuppie was a cripple, his poor feet being twisted and club-shaped, so that walking with him was a shuffling, uncertain sort of progression, and all things considered, he preferred crawling, as being easier and quicker, too.

But his mother had declared that he should have no boy's clothes until such time as he

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would accustom himself to hobbling along on his poor deformed feet; and hence Yuppie, at the age of seven, was still wearing his sister's left-off frocks and petticoats, greatly to his own disgust, though to the saving of his mother's scanty pocket, as there were no other boys in the Bowles family, and any masculine apparel of a juvenile pattern must have been specially provided.

"Lor, how he do snore!" ejaculated Yuppie, drawing a deep breath of satisfaction, his small face quivering with delight, as he slapped his linsey frock with his dirty hands by way of emphasis.

"He ain't nothin' to what some is," chimed in another boy, who prided himself on superior knowledge in such matters; "he's but a mild un, is Sam. You see, his poor 'ead ain't strong, an' it don't take but a small lot to bowl him over."

"It's real nice gettin' drunk, I suppose?" and Yuppie sighed reflectively, his fingers giving a disdainful twitch to his hated skirts as he turned away.

"Ya, you're a green un, Yuppie; why Sam 'll

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be no end bad when he wakes, his tongue 'll be parched like brown paper, his head 'll ache as never was, and he'll be fit to hang hisself from sheer miserableness, see if he ain't," said the boy who had spoken before, and who was called Spider, because of his uncouth, sprawling movements.

"Then what makes him do it, sure there ain't no sense in makin' yerself bad, an' wastin' yer time an' money for nothin'?" cried Yuppie, who was nothing if not philosophical.

"Oh, you never thinks about the after part of it when you're drinkin'; an' it's nice at first, you goes all swimmy an' funny, an' the tables an' cheers they takes to runnin' round like hosses in a circus, an' you feels as if you wants to sing an' holler, an' hit out," explained Spider, condescendingly.

"Did you ever feel like that; was you drunk once?" breathed Yuppie in an awed tone, and staring at his companion.

Spider modestly assented, knowing how the assertion would raise him in Yuppie's eyes, and then he spoilt it all by saying: "Yes,

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twice; once at Wiston fair, on a mug o' 'arf-an'-'arf, and at Wayle races, when me an' two more had three pennorth o' gin 'ot; my, I wor bad that time!"

"Then it's you as is a green un, Spider Coombs, an' not me," cried Yuppie. "For sure, if gettin' drunk made me bad fust time, I wouldn't be sich a mortal soft as to go in for a second dose;" and he snapped his small, brown fingers derisively in Spider's face, flapping his petticoats up and down in a manner expressive of great scorn.

Spider turned on him angrily, offering to fight, and Yuppie, squirming about on the ground, declared himself quite ready to begin, when a diversion was effected by the appearance on the scene of two boys, who had just come back from the next hamlet of Hazel-Lea, where they had been to buy groceries at Tappenden's Stores.

These boys, Bob and Dick Hawkins, were brimming over with tidings so wonderful, that in the hearing of them and the after discussion,

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Sam Waller was entirely forgotten; the whole group, Yuppie included, adjourning to the timber-yard for the purpose.

"The Methodies be comin' next Sunday to have a preachment meetin' in this very timber-yard," announced Bob Hawkins, looking round on the group of listeners with swelling importance.

"It's true, every word on it," put in Dick, nodding his head vigorously; he was so much given to untruths himself, that it seemed necessary to him that his brother's bare word should be propped up, as not being reliable otherwise.

"Where 'll they be comin' from do yer reckon?" asked Jacky Epps, a wizened-faced boy, with a cast in his eye.

"From Wayle, mebbe," put in Spider, who had remained silent, chiefly from surprise, but was now beginning to recover the temporary shock.

"There ain't no Methodies in Wayle, leastways not o' this breed, they doesn't flourish there, cos o' the 'orse racin'; these yer ones be a special sort," bragged Bob, who was

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lounging against the mighty trunk of a felled oak.

"What is Methodies, has they got black faces like the niggers at Wiston fair?" asked Yuppie, who was trembling with excitement at the prospect in store.

"Lor, no, Yuppie Bowles, they's a sort o' Christians as prays loud, an' when one's 'ard at it t'others cheers him on wi' shoutin' Amen, an' sich like in the middle. Oh, it's powerful good 'earin', I tells yer, an' it makes yer feel 'appy an' good, whiles it's goin' on, that is if you hadn't bin too wicked yersel just beforehand," said Dick Hawkins, glad of a chance to get a word in.

"You'd better be careful, then, 'twixt this an' Sunday, or belike it won't be 'appy that you'll be," retorted Yuppie, scathingly. And then, happy in that he had had the last word, he cast himself on the ground and began to crawl rapidly in the direction of his home, which was a long, low cottage at the other extremity of the Green, and just at the bottom of Farmer Maythorn's garden.

He was eager to spread the news of the

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Methodies' visit, knowing that he might thereby attain to an extra slice of treacle and bread, Mrs. Bowles being always more generously disposed when there was anything unusual stirring in the little hamlet.

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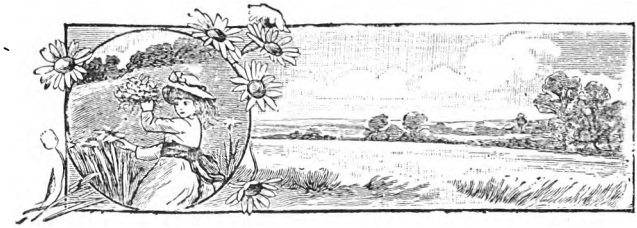

CHAPTER II.

RED SUNDAY.

THE earlier hours of Sunday were always busy ones in the cottages on Bodsam Green, and indeed in surrounding hamlets as well. It was the favourite day for bread-baking, and the making of sufficient pies and puddings to last the week through, whilst any odd bits of washing, or house-cleaning were also got through with at the same time, in order to leave the women free for those out-door avocations of stone-picking, weeding, harvesting, turniping, and fruit-gathering, with which they endeavoured to eke out the scanty wages of their husbands.

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By dinner-time this activity was at an end; and dinner over, the children were turned out to play on the Green if the weather was favourable, and sometimes when it was not. And in the temporary quiet thus gained, the weary fathers and mothers indulged in sleep.

Tea was a festival regulated by the limits of each one's finances, and then, men, women, and children went off for a stroll, in summer-time about the fields and woods, in winter to the nearest public-house, where the men drank mugs of beer, and the women gossiped, taking occasional sips from the mugs of their respective owners; whilst the children sat in the corners, and chewed peppermints.

Church-going was not fashionable at Bodsam Green, and this for several reasons, the church was far away, over a mile in fact, and the service was held only once in each Sunday, in the morning one week, and in the afternoon the next, as the vicar had the neighbouring parish of Hazel-Lea under his care. Besides all this, church-going as a habit brought its responsibilities, you then had a character

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and reputation to keep up; any little lapse from rectitude was totted up against you, a chance oath, or a glib lie brought down a storm of reproof and censure distinctly unpleasant to be borne. Whereas if you never went to church excepting, of course, on the regulation occasions of christenings, weddings, and funerals, no one flung stones at your morality, or even attempted so much as a surprised look at any slight deviation from the narrow way of uprightness and virtue.

The Sunday of the opening of the Methodist campaign dawned bright and fair. It was the middle of June and midsummer weather as well. The six elm trees before the blacksmith's shop, were thronged with singing birds in the early dawning, who seemed to be holding a special praise meeting on their own account.

Yuppie heard them and wondered, as he crept slyly out of the house before breakfast was ready, and crawled down to the timber-yard to see if the Methodies had come. There was no one about, however,

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and so he crawled back again, and stayed on the dewy grass under the big elm trees to listen to the feathered concert. His sister Sally came to find him when breakfast was ready, slapping him for crawling through the wet grass, and making his clean petticoats dirty.

At this he yelled lustily, as was the custom under such circumstances, though the blows were not heavy, and he was not unduly inconvenienced by them; and he cried dismally all the way up the garden-path and into the house, where his bedraggled garments were exhibited to his mother, and a second chastisement administered by her hand, which was harder, and hurt more than Sally's.

Breakfast was not exactly a festival for Yuppie that morning, smarting as he was from his mother's vigorous slapping, and puzzled as well by a sense of the injustice of it all. The clean garments provided for him that morning, would have to last until the following Saturday under any conditions, and if he chose to make them dirty right off

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what did it matter to any one? Pursuing this train of thought, he munched his hunch of dripping and bread in solemn silence, and was only deterred from asking for a second helping, by the sure and certain knowledge that he would not get it.

After breakfast, Sally took the tin can from the shelf in the wash-house, and went up to Mrs. Maythorn's to fetch the milk, returning ten minutes later in a great state of excitement, saying that the Methodies had come, and were having some breakfast in Mrs. Maythorn's kitchen, after which they meant to have a meeting in the timber-yard, and Sally had been instructed to invite her father and mother to be present.

The Maythorns had not lived at Bodsam Green many months, and were known to be different from most of the people in that neighbourhood, by their regular attendance at church, and the rigid observance of Sunday which was maintained at the farm. But it was a surprise that the Methodies should have found a harbour of refuge there,

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and Mrs. Bowles looked at her husband with considerable amazement.

"D'ye hear that, Bowles? Our Sally says the Methodies be a stayin' at the maaster's, for sure that's a rum go on the face on it."

"I dunno," replied Skittles reflectively, as he lounged by the door, smoking a short black pipe; "they say as it's some o' the Blaydon lot as is coming here to-day, an' the missus comes from there you know, so it may be relations o' her'n, don't you see."

"Oh," ejaculated Mrs. Bowles, and sat staring for a minute out through the window in a quiet sort of way, as if she were thinking very deeply. Polly, the girl next older than Yuppie, noticed her mother's abstraction, and took prompt advantage of it to insert a sly finger and thumb into the sugar-bowl, and to draw out a big pinch of soft sugar.

But her mother became suddenly alert again, and dealing out a swift retribution to the offending Polly, bundled the younger children out to play, calling on Sally to come

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and sweep up the house. Sally had hidden herself, however, and was nowhere to be found, so Emma, the second girl, was pressed into service, sorely against her will; whilst Yuppie and Polly started off for the timber-yard in order to be first at the meeting. They found Sally there before them, and the three choosing a pile of weather-boarding as a good position, climbed on to it, and sat down to await events. Others, as curious as they, joined them, and presently quite a little crowd had collected, and then Farmer Maythorn came down the Green, walking besides an old man with white hair, and who had one long, strong leg, and one little one, this peculiarity causing him to need a crutch to help him along.

Yuppie was quick to notice this deformity, and flapped his petticoats in great derision. "Look at old dot-and-carry-one; lor, ain't he funny!" he cried with a squeal of delighted laughter, but Sally cuffed his ears and bade him be silent, for the lame man was a friend of Mrs. Maythorn's or some relation perhaps, and it might not be wise to ridicule him.

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Behind the farmer and his guest, were a cluster of quiet-looking people carrying hymn-books and Bibles, and after these, bringing up the rear, came Mrs. Maythorn and her two little girls, both very smart and trim in white frocks, and blue ribbon sashes, and neat stockings and shoes. At sight of them, Yuppie squirmed in his place, and made the worst grimaces of which he was capable, out of sheer envy and malice, because Kate and Winnie Maythorn had straight feet and legs, whilst his own were crooked and misshapen. But when the first hymn began, he forgot all about such mundane things as feet and legs, whether crooked or straight; and was forthwith enchanted, trying with might and main to catch the refrain, and let his shrill treble join with the other voices in singing:

> "And crown Him, crown Him, crown Him
> Lord of all."

When the singing was over, the lame man, who had been sitting down, got up, and taking off his hat, shut his eyes, and

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began praying aloud. He looked so queer standing there on one leg, leaning on his crutch, that Jacky Epps, who was perched up next to Yuppie, began to laugh, and being cuffed over head and ears by Sally Bowles, lost his balance, and went rolling to the ground with resounding bumps, gathering many bruises as he went. There was a little titter at this accident, but order was soon restored, and the service swung smoothly on to its close.

Yuppie had but a very hazy idea as to what it was all about, but he carried away a sensation of keen enjoyment, and a word here and there that had stuck to him in passing.

The dinners were cooked but indifferently well on Bodsam Green that day, the potatoes were half raw, and the cabbage was still crisp, for the housewives had been attracted to their garden gates by the novelty of the meeting, and the sweetness of the singing, and the cooking had thus been left to take care of itself. But there were few murmurs at this, every one being eager for the

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second service, and little inclined to cavil, despite the fact that some of the puddings were so very much underdone, that they almost glued together the jaws of the unfortunate people who tried to eat them.

The second service was largely attended, indeed the numbers were greater than Yuppie could count, his arithmetic getting hopelessly muddled when thirty was passed as a rule, and there were many more than thirty people on Bodsam Green that afternoon.

The lame man preached a sermon at that second service, and it was all about some one else who had spent his money and was hungry, and after eating pigs' food, and finding it didn't fill him, he put his pride in his pocket and went back home to his father. The father must have been a real good man, too, so Yuppie thought, as he listened to the sermon, for he took the poor beggar-man in, and got out some smart clothes and a ring, and called the servants to kill a calf to cook for supper, so that the son should have a good feed to make him forget his troubles.

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There was a lot more of it, but Yuppie did not listen to the rest, being busy turning over in his mind what he had already heard. Then they sang a hymn about sinners poor and wretched, in which he joined lustily, although as both words and melody were strange to him, the result was a good many discords, as might have been expected.

The Methodies went away to Hazel-Lea in the evening to hold a meeting there, and nearly all the people from Bodsam Green went too.

Yuppie remained at home, however, sitting on the door-step wrapped in meditation; he could not walk to the next village, and so was left at home in the care of Jacky Epps' mother, who also was not good at walking. He was puzzling over the lame man's sermon, and wondering what it all meant. Mrs. Epps supposed him to be tired with the excitement of the day, and good-naturedly insisted on putting him to bed. He submitted to her kind attentions, with a funny feeling all about him, as

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though he were some other boy, or had been born into a different world. For across the colourless horizon of his every-day life had come a wonderful change; it had been a red-letter day: a red Sunday in fact, which stood out strong and clear against the dull uniformity of all the days that had gone before.

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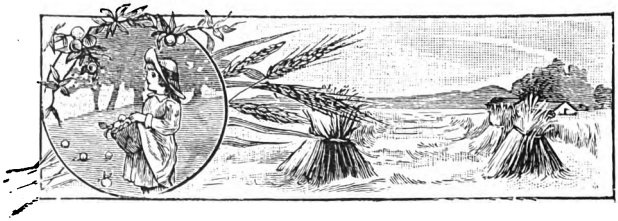

CHAPTER III.

YUPPIE'S MISTAKE.

ON Mondays, Mrs. Bowles did her own washing, or went to field work. On Tuesdays, she went to Mrs. Maythorn's to do the washing there, on which occasions Yuppie kept house while his three sisters went to school.

He ought to have gone to school himself, as the school-house was no great distance, being situated at the limit of the Green just beyond the timber-yard. But he had no particular thirst for the knowledge contained in books, and cried at the mere mention

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of school, knowing that his mother could not withstand his tears in such a case, having a great horror of any one "putting upon her pore hafflicted child," as she said, though just where the putting upon came in no one seemed to know; the schoolmaster being a kind, humane sort of man, and the routine easier than that observed in many other schools. When the school-attendance officer came to Bodsam Green, he never interfered with Yuppie, not guessing even that the small object in petticoats, crawling feebly across the grass, or huddled under a gooseberry bush in his mother's garden, was long past school-age, and should by rights have laid in quite a store of learning by this time.

Whilst Mrs. Bowles did her washing on that day following Yuppie's red Sunday, he sat by the copper fire to feed it with sticks, and plagued her with so many questions that she was driven nearly wild by them.

"Say, mother, who was the lame man wot preached yesterday?"

"Oh, he was Mister Harwood, the grocer,

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from Wellindge; he's own uncle to Mrs. Maythorn at the farm, that's why all the Methodies had dinner and tea there yesterday;" and Mrs. Bowles splashed away at the soap-suds, sending flecks of foam down on to Yuppie, as he poked sticks into the copper fire, which made his hair damp, and his neck uncomfortable, although, as the weather was warm, he did not complain.

"Wot makes him have one big leg and one small one, he'd look a deal nicer with 'em both of a size; or say, was he born so?"

This with a pathetic look at his own distorted limbs, and a little sigh because he himself had been "born so."

Mrs. Bowles gave an impatient fling to the soap-suds, and so much water descended on Yuppie that he gazed up apprehensively, and wriggled further away; then, as she did not reply, he urged again in insistent tones:

"Say, mother, was he born so?"

"Lor, no; bother the child, how ye do worry. They says as how he had a fever when he wor a boy, which settled in his leg, an' it never growed no more."

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"Is that in the Bible, wot he were a sayin' about the man as hadn't got nothin' to eat, and went 'ome to his father?" demanded Yuppie, the subject of Mr. Harwood's lame leg having been settled to his satisfaction.

"Yes, of course; preachers always makes their sermons out of the Bible," responded Mrs. Bowles, in happy ignorance of some modern methods of sermon manufacture, which have little of the Bible in them, saving the text.

"Wot did it all mean now, anyhow?" asked Yuppie again, reaching the bellows, for the fire had gone very dead.

"How should I know? I can't read," retorted his mother, tartly.

"But you can give a guess, wot's the use o' sermons anyhow?"

"Oh, bother the child, wot a plague it is, anyhow!" cried Mrs. Bowles, in fretful impatience. "Why, on course, sermons is to show us wot to do, though I reckons as 'ow we'd 'ave our 'ands full, if we took it serious."

"Then if Sally had been out, an' spent

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all her money, an' was 'ungry, does it mean you'd have to get her nice things to eat, an' sort o' treat her like company when she come back?"

"Yes, yes," cried Mrs. Bowles, impatiently, having had more than enough of the subject, and anxious to concentrate her attention on the copper, which was just beginning to show signs of boiling; "that's what it means,—your own child, or any other poor creature, for the matter of that."

At this moment the copper boiled over in real earnest, and Yuppie had to save himself from a scalding by rolling over into the ashes, at the risk of a burning, whilst Mrs. Bowles poked and stirred at the seething mass of boiling soap-suds and linen; and dense clouds of steam, acrid and pungent, filled the air, enveloping Mrs. Bowles and Yuppie, then escaping by the open door to the room beyond.

Yuppie also escaped, though the manner of his going was slower, and seating himself on the garden path in the sunshine, made a congregation of small stones on the ground,

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ranging them in rows, as the people sat in the timber-yard, then preached the lame man's sermon to them, or at least as much of it as he could remember.

The next morning, his mother went up to the farm to do Mrs. Maythorn's washing, and the other children going off to school, Yuppie was left in charge; the next door neighbour, Mrs. Epps, undertaking to see that no harm came to him.

But that morning it so happened Mrs. Epps had a visitor, an aunt of hers from Whatley, who had a daughter living at Holt, a farm half a mile away. As was only natural, the aunt and Mrs. Epps strolled away towards the Holt farm, after a time, to see the daughter who was living in service there; and quite forgetting the small boy next door, who was keeping house by himself.

Yuppie saw them go, and was rather pleased than otherwise; he was having a grand time, having dragged all the chairs in the front room into the middle of the floor, and brought the bolster and pillows from his mother's

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bed, and propped them up in the chairs to represent people. To this congregation he was preaching away with great vigour and earnestness, when a sudden shadow darkened the sunshine of the doorway, and a pitiful whine interrupted his discourse.

It was a wretched old woman, clad in filthy rags; half-blind she seemed, and tottering with old age and decrepitude, and her voice was pathetic enough to awaken even Yuppie's pity, as she pleaded for a morsel of bread.

He was seated on the table, having reached that eminence with no little difficulty, but he scrambled down with all speed, and making his way across the floor by the help of his chair congregation, he asked her if she was very hungry indeed.

"Aye, aye, young sir," cried the old woman, dropping a professional curtsy; "it's nigh starved I am, not a bite or sup have I had between my lips since yesterday mornin', when I got a few mouthfuls of pigs' food from a farmhouse."

Yuppie's eyes grew round and eager; the

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mention of pigs' food settled any doubts he might have had on the subject, and holding on to the nearest chair, by which to steady his poor uncertain feet, he asked, in a breathless tone: "An' yer didn't find the pigs' food fillin', I reckon?"

"Bless yer pretty heart, no; it's poor stuff for human critters, anyhow."

"Yes, yes, I know; the preacher, he said so on Sunday," put in Yuppie, hastily; asking, in the same breath: "An' yer sorry for your sins, I suppose?"

The question seemed rather to perplex the old creature, but after a moment's hesitation she mumbled an affirmation, and Yuppie flung out his hand in a gesture of welcome.

"Come in, come in, I've been expecting yer to come," he said, remembering that the preacher had spoken of the man in the Bible falling on the beggar's neck and kissing him; but as he was so small himself, this part of the performance had of necessity to be omitted.

Nothing loth, the beggar woman crossed the threshold, and dropped with a weary

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air into the chair Yuppie pushed forward with hospitable haste. "Have yer got anything to eat?" she asked, anxious to secure the expected slice of treacle and bread, or hunch of cold pudding before any interruption came.

"Yes, yes, but you're in such a hurry; I've got to dress yer first, yer know," he said, panting with his exertions, as he crawled with all haste into his mother's bedroom, and returned dragging her Sunday gown after him. There was no upstairs to the cottage of Skittle Bowles, which proved a great convenience to the cripple boy; and wriggling across the floor to the old woman's side, he held up the gown in triumph.

"There it is, an' I reckon it'll fit yer pretty well. Can yer do up the hooks by yourself, do yer think?"

The old woman lifted up her shaking hands in excited protest, but Yuppie did not hear it; he was out of the front door, and crawling along to the next house, as fast as he could go.

Mumbling and mouthing, the old creature

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turned over the Sunday-best gown of Mrs. Bowles in her dirty, trembling fingers, slipping a sly, thievish hand into the pocket to see if there was anything there worth annexing, her face gathering discontent to find nothing but a folded tract and two buttons, where she had hoped to discover an odd copper lurking.

At this moment, Yuppie returned with a pair of shoes in tow, and something else tightly clasped in one hand.

"Mother's only got one pair o' shoes, so I had to borrer some from Mrs. Epps, an' I brought her brooch, cos mother hadn't got one, nor a ring neither," he said, unclosing his hand, and displaying a tinsel brooch with bits of coloured glass to simulate rubies.

"Lawk-a-mussy, what is the child after?" cried the beggar woman, holding up her hands in great consternation, for she could look ahead, if Yuppie could not, and was already wondering what the mother would say about such unpractical benevolence.

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"Put 'em on, put 'em on!" said Yuppie, in his most dictatorial fashion, "an' then I'll be findin' yer summut to eat."

"Ah, do, there's a dearie, now," cried the old creature, in a wheedling tone.

"We ain't got no calf, an' I couldn't kill it if we had," went on Yuppie, dubiously; "but there's a bit o' bacon as mother were a goin' to fry for father's supper, could yer fancy that, now, do yer think?" he asked, with an air of such anxious hospitality, that again the old woman held up her hands in consternation and amazement.

"Lord love yer, boy, if boy yer are, though to me yer seems like a white-robed angel from heaven, I'd rather 'ave a mossel o' fried bacon, than anythink else on the face o' this earth, it fair makes my mouth water to think on it."

"P'raps yer wouldn't mind comin' out in the wash-house an' liftin' the pan down then, I can't reach it very well," said Yuppie, leading the way to the little back kitchen, and pointing to where the frying-pan hung on a nail above the copper.

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The old woman lifted it down, and Yuppie scuttling off to the pantry, returned with the bacon: a little fire still smouldered on the low hearth, and carefully raking this open, the beggar placed the frying-pan over it, and putting the bacon in the pan, crouched down to enjoy the feast by anticipation.

But, alas, for her expectations, the feast went no further than anticipation!

Mrs. Maythorn's drying-ground was in the meadow adjoining the cottage garden, and Mrs. Bowles, staggering under the weight of a big basket filled with newly-washed garments, made her way thither, soon after eleven o'clock, rejoicing not a little in the thought that her work was speeding so well.

But her active fingers had not pegged more than three or four of Winnie Maythorn's big white pinafores on the line, than her sense of smell was attracted by the appetising odour of frying bacon.

In some surprise she looked round and sniffed again, more vigorously this time. They were not cooking meat at the farm-

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house, she knew, Mrs. Maythorn always arranging a cold dinner for washing day, and it was too early for any cottage dinner thereabouts. A second glance revealed a thin curl of smoke from her own back kitchen chimney on the other side of the meadow; and dropping pegs and pinafores unheeded on the grass, she rushed away to see who it was that was daring to make a raid on her pantry in her absence.

She tore a long rent in her gown, in the haste she made scrambling over the hedge, and this did not make her feel more amiable, as with a flourish she flung open the back door of her house, then paused on the threshold, transfixed by the sight that greeted her astonished eyes.

The beggar woman was in the act of dishing the slices of bacon on to a plate, where a thick piece of bread lay ready to catch the fat. A knife and fork were placed on the table in readiness for the meal; whilst Yuppie hovered near, his face wearing the rapt, exalted look of some saint of the Middle Ages.

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Just exactly what Mrs. Bowles said, no one ever remembered, but her actions were prompt enough; the old woman found herself, in less time than it takes to write the words, outside on the garden path, with an angry woman and a locked door behind her, and, alas for her expectations, no bacon, and no bread either!

And Yuppie—it might be well to draw a veil over that ten minutes' scene with his mother after the beggar woman had been so summarily ejected. He had to bear the brunt of a twofold anger for his mistake, Mrs. Epps returning just at that moment from her stroll, to find her best boots and her brooch both missing.

Poor Yuppie, cowering under the bedclothes in the stuffy chamber where his mother had locked him in, sobbed stormily over the injustice with which he had been treated, for merely trying to follow out the teaching of the Bible, as he understood it.

He was sore from the thrashing he had received, and appalled by the knowledge that he was to have no dinner that day; but

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worse than these even, was the muddle of his ideas concerning how much of the lame man's sermon was to be believed, and how much to be rejected. In the middle of his hopeless attempts at solving the problem, he fell asleep, and so forgot all about it.

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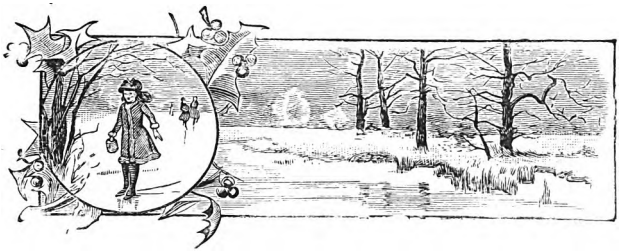

CHAPTER IV.

YUPPIE AT SCHOOL.

THE upshot of this escapade of Yuppie's was, that he was forthwith provided with boy's clothes, and packed off to school in company with his sisters; Mrs. Bowles deciding with practical common-sense that if her "poor hafflicted child" was capable of getting into so much mischief at home, he had much better be sent where he would be kept in order, and at the same time taught something useful as well.

He would have been sent in petticoats, but for the schoolmaster declining to receive him in the nondescript garb he wore when

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at home; and thus to his huge delight was Yuppie promoted to knickerbockers, and a little jacket with pockets in which might be stowed away no end of those treasures, in which the hearts of small boys do especially delight.

And when the first shyness and strangeness had worn away, he found to his surprise that school was really rather nice than otherwise. He mastered the letters of the alphabet in half the time his sisters had taken to acquire the same amount of information, and would doubtless have become the pattern scholar of his standard, but for an unfortunate leaning towards mischievous tricks intended to upset the order of the class, and a habit of day-dreaming, which proved very much against him in getting, and maintaining a good position among his class-mates.

The object which most excited his admiration was the blackboard, and if only he might have been allowed to scribble on it with the chalk, he thought life would hold nothing more to wish for, and that

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denied him, he just turned sulky and sullen, spending his time in wondering how he could outwit the master, and attain the object of his desires, instead of attending to the instructions of the patient pupil-teacher who was vainly trying to instil into the thick little heads of the Bodsam infants, the fact that twice two made four.

It was one morning, late in July, two days before school closed for the harvest holiday, and Yuppie's class were more or less actively employed in giving their teacher all possible trouble, when through the big open window that looked on to the road, Sam Waller, the postman, could be seen approaching the door.

Sam, like many other rural postal messengers, not only burdened himself with his legitimate bundles, bags, and boxes, but carried also many small parcels from village to village, for which he received payments, not in money, but in kind, cups of tea, slices of cake or bread-and-butter, or even mugs of beer, which last, alas! too often worked to poor Sam's undoing.

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He carried on this particular morning a birdcage for the blacksmith, a bottle of medicine for Mrs. Epps, and a small box for the schoolmaster from a brother pedagogue at Wellindge, which he now proceeded to deliver in presence of the whole school.

There were letters and papers as well, but the master laid them aside for the present, pausing only to open the box from his Wellindge friend, because a slight scratching, scuttling noise, had led him to believe that the package contained something alive.

The children had gathered the same impression, and heads were craned eagerly forward to get a glimpse of the contents so soon as the covering paper should be taken off.

But the master's fingers were not so steady and deliberate as usual, and, in unwinding the string, the parcel slipped from his grasp, falling to the floor, and immediately there was a scuttling rush of small atoms from the broken box, whilst a chorus of

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children's voices exclaimed: "It's white mice, teacher, and they's runned away!"

"Catch them, catch them!" cried the master, in great excitement, dropping on all fours to start the search.

Nothing loth, the children flung aside books and slates, whilst for the next ten minutes a pretty lively confusion reigned in the schoolroom, some of the youngsters squealed with fright, and clambered on the benches for safety, but the majority grovelled on the ground, hugely delighted to be quit of lessons if only for a few minutes, these tumbled over each other in the excitement of the chase, missing a mouse perhaps by a hair's breadth almost, and the shouts, the screaming, and the laughter, rose to a pitch that was simply deafening.

In the midst of this scene of riot and uproar, Yuppie alone remained calm and composed. Taking advantage of the temporary relaxing of authority, he had made his way to the blackboard, and steadying himself by clinging to the frame-

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work against which it leaned, was scrawling away to his heart's content.

But the mice were caught at last, all saving one that had dived into a hole behind the master's desk, and thus put itself beyond the reach of pursuit. Then the bell was rung for silence, and in the scramble to regain their places, Yuppie dropped his chalk, and mixed himself up with the other children, and a hush of renewed order fell over the school. Most of the juveniles were flushed and smiling from the fun and frolic of the diversion, and looking round upon them the master smiled too, and was opening his lips to say a few words of thanks for their energetic endeavours, when his eye fell upon the blackboard, and the smile was replaced by a frown.

Five minutes before the postman's arrival, he had put a sum on the board, the beginning of a new rule it was, and he had worked it carefully from beginning to end, so that his senior pupils might have their work plainly set out for them, but

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now, great disfiguring scrawls had blotted out his neat rows of figures, there were smudges here, and dashes there, so that his work was entirely spoiled.

It was not so much the fact of having to do the sum again, that angered the master, as the defiance implied by the action, which must have been performed before his face almost, and his frown gathered in blackness as he looked.

The brewing storm quickly had its reflection on the faces of the children, they looked apprehensively at each other, then their gaze, following the direction of the master's, fell on the blackboard, and the apprehension was changed to consternation.

Yuppie sucked his thumb with great content, he had realised his ambition and was happy, and concerned himself not at all about the consequences.

"Who did that?" asked the master in an awful voice, not loud, but deep and solemn, and which made the listeners shiver and quake.

"Please, sir, I see'd Yuppie Bowles a

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drawrin' somethin' on the board," volunteered a small girl in a pink pinafore.

Yuppie took his thumb from his mouth, in order to execute a grimace that should effectually scare pink pinafore; but hardly had he got his features screwed up to the desired pitch of hideous ferocity, than the stern voice spoke again:

"Arthur John Bowles, come here."

But Yuppie began to be frightened, and collapsing in a limp heap on the floor, set up a dismal howling, which he hoped might attract the attention of his mother in the cottage at the other end of Bodsam Green, and bring her flying across to the school in time to rescue him from the clutches of the master.

No miracle was worked on his behalf, however, and he was dragged forward by Jacky Epps and Spider Coombs to receive the just reward for his flagrant wrong-doing.

But when the master's eyes travelled down the small form, and rested on the poor distorted feet, which were Yuppie's

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heritage of woe, the stern lines of his face relaxed and melted into pity. One might be angry at a breach of discipline like this, but it was not easy to punish a small boy afflicted as Yuppie was, and for that time the master let his humanity over-ride his justice.

His right hand which had seized the cane, let it fall, and he said, mildly enough: "Arthur John Bowles, why did you spoil all those figures of mine that were on the board?"

"I—I wanted to see how it felt to write with a chalk," sobbed Yuppie, whose eyes were furtively watching the cane.

The master walked out from behind his desk then, and going over to the blackboard he lifted it down from the framework, resting it on the floor, and taking a duster carefully wiped it clean from marks of any sort. Meanwhile, the whole school watched him in breathless wonderment.

"Arthur John Bowles, come here," he said, presently, and this time, Yuppie obeyed

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him without compulsion, for there was no hint of judgment to come, only pitying kindness in the master's voice.

Shuffling along past the row of curious, gaping children, he stood at length by the side of the master, his heart beating fast, and the remnant of a sob still catching at his breath.

The master handed him the chalk, a beautiful new piece it was, not a stumpy little remnant of a stick, and then he said, quietly: "You can sit on the floor, Arthur John Bowles, and write on that board until school is over. But if you ever spoil my work again, I shall thrash you, as I would thrash any other child who disobeyed me; do you understand?"

"Yessir," replied Yuppie, with a nod of his sagacious head, and taking the proffered chalk he plumped down on the floor in front of the board, and straightway entered into Paradise. He made birds, and pigs, owls, bats, and butterflies, the schoolmaster at his desk, the lame man preaching on the Green, and finished up with a memory

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portrait of himself, twisted feet and all. No one else would have been able to put a name to the scrawls, or to identify them as representing anything in particular, but that did not matter since he knew himself.

And the other children looked and wondered, jealousy stirring in the hearts of some, envy for a similar privilege making others unmindful of their work.

But the master took no notice, and the morning wore away, the morning during which—a part of it at least—Yuppie had been the happiest boy in the county of Kent.

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CHAPTER V.

THE LAME MAN AGAIN.

DURING those summer Sundays, the Wellindge Methodists came regularly to hold services on Bodsam Green, and week by week the throngs of people who came to hear grew larger. They had a variety of preachers at those meetings; now it would be a young student out for a summer holiday, who, likely as not, would take his text from a handful of flowers; or it would be some farm-labourer bowed with a week of toil in the fields, yet filled with such

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zeal for the coming of the kingdom, that he could not refrain from filling his one day of leisure with work and service for his Lord.

But, to Yuppie's great disappointment, the lame man had not been since that first Sunday of all, though he had watched eagerly for him, being disposed to take a morbid interest in the preacher's deformity.

It was the last Sunday in August, a blazing hot day by the way; and in consequence of the heat, the meeting had been compelled to adjourn from the timber-yard to the shade of the six elm trees, just in front of the cottage where Skittle Bowles had his home.

There had been no meeting in the morning, and the afternoon service had not seen a large attendance, for the people were worn out with a week's work in the harvest-fields, and compelled to make up their arrears of sleep. But when the shadows began to lengthen, and the heat to lessen, groups might be seen wending their way across the

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fields in the direction of the hill-hamlet where Yuppie lived.

Presently the news went round among the children, that Mr. Harwood had come, and reaching Yuppie's ears, sent him shuffling down the garden-path in great delight. He was not allowed to crawl now; but as he had been provided with two stout sticks this did not matter so much.

There was a chair and a table set in the shadiest part of the Green for the convenience of the preacher, and Yuppie placed himself as near to this spot as he could, in order to be well to the fore in all that was going on. His father and mother appeared presently, and came to sit near where he had chosen his own position. Usually his father lounged in the back-ground, or did not come to meeting at all, and Yuppie stared to see him sitting there so quietly, with a sort of anxious restlessness on his face, as though his dinner had not agreed with him, or something had occurred to make him feel unhappy.

The people were singing some hymns to

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beguile the time of waiting, when Spider Coombs crept up behind Yuppie, to communicate a piece of news at once startling and disquieting.

"Say, Yuppie Bowles, does yer know wot's the matter with yer fawther?" he asked, sportively tweaking Yuppie's left ear, until it seemed as though it would be wrenched right off.

But Yuppie had a pin handy, and paid this debt off with great promptness, merely remarking, with reference to his father, that he "reckoned Sal had made his dander ris, she 'avin' bin oncommon aggravatin' all day."

"It ain't Sal, it's his sins, your fawther is goin' ter be converted ter night, so they says, Yuppie Bowles," returned Spider.

"Who says so?" demanded the boy, stealing a furtive look at his father, and noticing the haggard look of care that brooded on his face.

"Them as knows, an' they says as he ain't slept a wink these three nights past, for fear as he might wake up in hell,"

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went on Spider, smacking his lips in great satisfaction.

Yuppie trembled visibly. "Won't he not go ter sleep again?" he asked, a piteous quiver showing itself at the corners of his mouth.

"Lor yes, wot a green un it is! He'll be as spry as six men, when he's converted, only he sort o' dreads it, don't yer see," responded Spider in a cheery whisper.

"Wot's it like, gettin' converted, I mean?" inquired Yuppie, glancing from Spider to his father, and then back to Spider again.

But that youth only shook his head. "Yer can't tell, some goes on different from others. There was Mrs. Hawkins, now, a fortnight ago, she went through it as quiet as a lamb in Tappenden's barn at Hazel-Lea, yer wouldn't have known there was anything the matter with her, when all of a sudden she 'olds up her 'ead and hollers out, 'appy like, 'Bless the Lord, I'm saved!' an' then all the folks got up an' sung a hymn."

"Oh!" ejaculated Yuppie with a deep

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drawn breath, and then he looked at his father, whilst Spider went on.

"But that fust Sunday as they 'eld a meetin' at Hazel-Lea, that was the time, I can tell you, when Birdy Bowles, as is your uncle, got converted. He wor most dreadful scared o' goin' to the bad place, he wor, an' rolled on the ground hollerin' for mercy, as made yer frightened to listen to him."

"Here comes the preacher, they're goin' ter begin; shut up, Spider," said Yuppie, as Mr. Harwood swung himself into the circle of people, leaning on his crutch.

The first part of the service was carried through with great energy and fervour, and after a rousing hymn, the lame man rose from his chair to announce his text.

Then a strange thing happened. He had opened the Bible with the confident air of one who knows exactly what he is going to look for; but even in turning the leaves his hand began to falter and shake, and after a moment's hesitation he shut the book again, and began to speak in a thick un-

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certain way: "I was going to preach to you to-night, dear friends, on the parable of the wheat and the tares, but I have somehow forgotten all about it, I don't even remember where to find my text. The Lord has shut my mouth to-night, but it may be that it is for His glory I am to be silent. Brother Maythorn, I call on you to carry this meeting on."

When he had said so much, the lame man sat down panting heavily, and Mr. Maythorn rose. He was a nervous-looking man of forty, reserved and quiet, shrinking always from any parade of his religious sentiments.

Spider nudged Yuppie, whispering to him to see how Farmer Maythorn shook; but because he was the "maaster" for whom his father worked, Yuppie sat immovable as a Sphinx, which being a stone figure is of course not able to move at all.

"I have never preached a sermon, I have never even spoken to any number of people about religion," began Mr. Maythorn in a low voice; which, however, grew louder and

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more distinct as he proceeded: "But seeing Brother Harwood has failed, and it must be either my poor effort, or nothing at all, why I say, let us pray first, and then afterwards look to God for leading."

At this all the people knelt down on the grass, and Yuppie knelt too, whilst the farmer prayed, and the people shouted "Amen" and "Hallelujah" as hard as they could all the time, just as if they wanted to encourage him.

Skittle Bowles sat with his hand covering his face when the people got up from praying; he was sitting on a stool that he had brought out from his own house, whilst his wife had a chair at his side.

"I am going to speak to you about a verse in the Bible which reads like this: 'The Son of man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost,'" said Mr. Maythorn, as he opened a little black Testament, which he had taken from his pocket.

At these words, Yuppie saw his father stir uneasily, as though rendered more uncomfortable than ever, but no one else seemed to

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notice, and the preacher went on: "Jesus Christ is the Son of man, and He came to the earth for the sole purpose of saving that which was lost. If we hadn't all been sick, sorry and sinful, there would have been no need for Him to come, and no work for Him to do when He did come. But seeing that we are all lost, and all in need of His saving grace, let us glorify His name, and honour His sacrifice, by coming to Him for salvation now, when we are needing it so sorely."

Just then a deep sob struck Yuppie's ear, and he left off listening to the preacher to watch his father, from whom, as he shrewdly guessed, the sob had broken forth.

But Skittle Bowles did not move, saving for a tremor that passed over him sometimes, at what the preacher was saying. For five minutes, ten minutes, Yuppie bore it, and then growing impatient under the strain of his father's slowness of action, he crept close up beside him, and whispered in an encouraging tone, which

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was sufficiently audible to those grouped around: "Hurry it up, and get it over father, belike you'll feel better when you've got converted."

"Aye, aye, boy, an' so I would, if only I could get at Him," replied the unhappy Skittles, in a tone of such want, and longing, that Mr. Maythorn left off trying to preach a sermon, and said that they would have a prayer-meeting instead.

Whilst the people were praying, and the poor man who could not find peace was beating his breast, and crying aloud, Mr. Harwood beckoned Yuppie across to where he was sitting, and the small boy shuffled nimbly towards him.

A woman was praying at this moment, her voice high-pitched and shrill, and yet so pathetic in its tones, that many of the other women began to cry at the sound of it. But Mr. Harwood, holding Yuppie's hand firmly in his own, said softly to him: "It is your father, isn't it?"

Yuppie nodded his head energetically by way of acknowledging the relationship.

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"He is very miserable," said the lame man in the same soft voice, which reached no other ears than Yuppie's.

The small boy nodded again, this time looking up into the other's face in a questioning manner.

"Why don't you pray for him yourself if he is your father, and you care for him?"

"Can't," replied Yuppie, shivering a little at the thought.

"But other people are doing it, you will not let them love your father more than you love him yourself. Kneel here close by me, boy, and let us pray for him together, no one will hear us but God."

Yuppie dropped on his knees close to the lame man, hiding his hot face against the other's knee.

"Say the words after me," whispered his friend, and Yuppie pursed up his mouth in readiness to begin.

"Please, Jesus Christ, let my father be willing to be saved by Thee, and send salvation to him now!" said the voice of the prompter, and Yuppie repeated the

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words after him, his own tones broken and trembling.

And at that moment Skittle Bowles, groping as it were in the darkness of his mental night, felt the hand of his Saviour, and grasping it tightly, stepped into the newness of life in Christ crucified.

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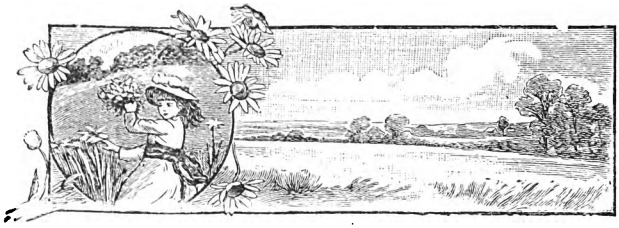
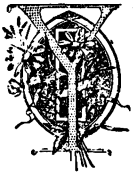


CHAPTER VI.

ON HIS OWN ACCOUNT.



UPPIE was disposed to take a great deal of credit to himself regarding his father's conversion; and often bragged about it, on the sly, to Spider Coombs and Jacky Epps, declaring that but for his assistance his father might still be enduring that terrible unrest of body and soul that kept him sleepless, and was fast wearing away strength and spirit too.

"Lor, wot a green un it is!" ejaculated Spider, one day, when they were nutting in Shrubswood, and Yuppie had been boasting of his prowess in prayer.

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"Look 'ere, Spider Coombs, it don't become the pot to call the kettle black; I ain't no greener than yerself," retorted the cripple, with great spirit.

Spider had given him a ride to the wood in Bob Hutton's hand-truck, and was to carry him home in the same manner. With such a burden of obligation on him, Yuppie might, at the very least, have been civil, but he wasn't; and squaring his small figure, he shook an angry fist in Spider's face, offering to fight it out.

"No, thank yer, I'm afraid of bein' beaten," retorted Spider, with a shout of laughter at his own wit, which made the quiet woodland ring, for he was nearly twice the size of Yuppie, and strong in proportion too.

"Don't call me a green un, then, or I'll have to make yer sorry for it," said Yuppie, swelling visibly with indignation.

"Well, yer are green, not to know as it's only Christians' prayers as gets answered," replied Spider, calmly.

"How do yer know that?" demanded the cripple boy, sharply.

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"It's common sense, that's 'ow I knows it. Arst yersel', now, is it likely as God A'mighty would trouble about the prayers o' them as never troubles about Him at all?" and Spider smiled in that irritating, superior way that always made Yuppie violently angry.

"How about the sinners, then, as is tryin' ter get converted, God 'ears them, else how would they get ter be Christians at all?" demanded Yuppie, with the air of one who had propounded an unanswerable argument.

But Spider was fully equal to the occasion, replying with a certain loftiness of manner: "Oh, that's different; God A'mighty always listens ter folks as wants ter love Him. But it ain't no use for you ter pretend as 'ow He is goin' to listen ter you, Yuppie Bowles, when you don't trouble to think about Him even, 'ceptin' when you want Him ter do somethin' ter please you, so there, now!"

Yuppie aimed a handful of nuts full at Spider's face, which stayed the torrent of his

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eloquence, evoking instead an outburst of abuse, for Spider could not meekly endure insults of this kind.

The timely arrival of Dick Hawkins and Jacky Epps on the scene, stayed further hostilities, and the nutting proceeded happily enough for an hour or two; Yuppie getting his share of the fun by picking up the nuts that had fallen, or gathering them from the lower boughs, that hung near enough to the ground for him to reach.

But though he was to all intents and purposes employed solely on nutting, his thoughts were busy enough in an entirely different direction, and he was pondering what Spider had said about an interest in Heavenly things being necessary, before you could expect to get any of the advantages pertaining to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Not that Yuppie thought his thoughts in those words, his mental reasoning was more after this fashion: "Yer can't never get nothink unless yer gives somethink for it.

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And it ain't not no use fer me to go a prayin' ter God A'mighty, until I leaves off thievin' sugar when mother's back is turned, an' sets up for bein' a Christian out an' out, like my father is now."

He had not really thrashed the question out to a fair issue, by the time the other boys had got their bags filled with nuts, and were ready to go home. His own bag was not nearly full, but no one commented on that; the other boys did not expect him to equal them in any feat of strength or perseverance, and though, had he been as industrious as the others, he might have picked up sufficient nuts to have filled his bag right up, they were much too good-natured to remind him of the fact, but hoisting him on to the hand-truck, and throwing their own well-filled bags up beside him, they harnessed themselves to the rickety vehicle, and set off at a wild gallop for home.

Hooting, shouting, yelling, as only country boys can hoot, shout, and yell, they tore down the lane past Mr. Maythorn's house

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and garden, and assisted Yuppie to alight on the Green in front of his own house, by the simple process of tipping him out on to the grass, then careering away to the forge, to return the truck to its rightful owner, the blacksmith.

Yuppie, who was well-used to this sort of thing, picked himself up without a murmur, and was about to levy contributions from the better-filled bags of his companions, but remembering some private resolution that he had made, desisted from his intended pilfering, and picking up his own bag, shuffled with it along the path to the house door.

His mother called to him to carry some cabbages to the pig, and, nothing loth, he set off to obey her behest, adding some acorns he had picked up, to the cabbages, then leaning over the side of the sty to pat the pig, and call it by endearing names; they two, Yuppie and the pig, being great friends.

When he went indoors again, his father had come home, and his mother was dish-

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ing up a great bowl of potatoes for their supper.

Skittle Bowles was greatly changed in many ways, since that night in August, when the people at the meeting had prayed for him, until he found grace. And his nickname, sobriquet, call it what you will, fitted him so badly that by tacit consent his mates were dropping it, and just contenting themselves with calling him Jack Bowles, until some more suitable name occurred to them. It had been the same with his brother, the poacher, whom every one had called Birdy Bowles; they tried calling him by his baptismal name of Joseph, for a time, but as that did not seem to fit him, they dropped into the habit of calling him Methody Bowles, which did excellently, as it served to distinguish him from the Bowles's of Hazel-Lea, who attended the parish church, and also from the Bowles's of Hill Street, who attended nowhere at all, saving indeed the inn that bore the sign of "The Croaking Raven."

"Father, how does yer like bein' a Christian?" asked Yuppie, when, his share of the potatoes

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disposed of, he had crept from the table to the fireside, and was snugly sitting on the floor between his father's feet, and well in front of the blaze.

Jack Bowles started nervously. He had stood the chaff of his mates without flinching, but he had always been shy and reserved in his own house, and before his own family, about that wonderful change and glory, that had flooded his poor dark soul on that August night.

"It makes a difference to a man, bein' a Christian," he answered with an effort, and looking, not down at the boy on the floor, but up at the ceiling above him.

"How?" demanded Yuppie, intent on getting the information he desired.

"Yer has ter be careful not ter let a bad word slip out, an' it ain't easy, that ain't, not when you've once got into the way o' thinkin' of things by the blackest way yer knows on."

"I don't say swear words," said Yuppie quickly, catching his father up sharply, as

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though desirous for him to get on a little faster with his experiences.

"I should think not," chimed in Mrs. Bowles; "I would soon put a thrashing outside that little jacket of your'n, if I thought you was up to anything of that sort, my boy."

Yuppie answered by a wriggle, almost as though he was really feeling the threatened punishment; and presently, after a few moments of silence, Jack Bowles went on:

"But if some things is 'ard, others comes a wonderful deal more easy. Take last week, now, when I 'ad ter help carry ole Sally Harkness to the churchyard; afore I was converted, I should have been quaking all the time, an' thinkin' 'ow dreadful 'tis to die. Instead o' that, I was able ter step along quite cheerful like, sayin' to myself, that when I had to be carried up the hill feet foremost, my soul would be in Heaven, rejoicin' in the blood that bought me."

Perhaps Jack Bowles, who, by nature, was

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a silent man, had never made such a long speech about anything before, and after this effort, he sat silent for a long time; so that the children crept off to bed one by one, whilst Mrs. Bowles cried into her apron, at the change in her husband. Tears of thankfulness they were, with may be a longing that a similar blessedness might come to her.

That night, when every one else was fast asleep, Yuppie woke up with a start and a shiver. He was going to cry out at first, because he was afraid to be awake when every one else was asleep; then, catching sight of the moon shining in calm and still through the window, he changed his mind about the fear, and sat boldly up in bed, clasping his small hands together, and looking out through the window.

"God A'mighty, are yer listenin'?" he cried, softly, addressing the pale moon, under the impression that it was a sort of window to the sky, and that the sound of his praying might gain admittance easier so. "I want ter be a Christian like father an' the others;

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make me one quick, please, cos there's such a dreadful sight o' things as I wants ter ask yer to give me afterwards!"

His petition ended, he curled down on his bed once more, and was quickly asleep again.

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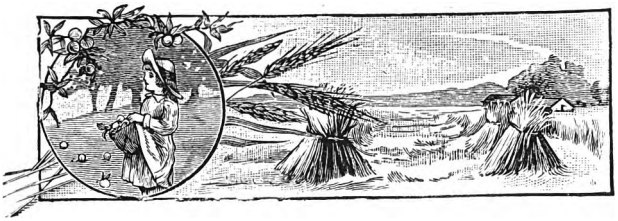

CHAPTER VII.

ASKING IN FAITH.

AUTUMN passed into winter; and such a winter as the oldest inhabitant in Bodsam Green had never seen equalled. With the first week in December, came a snowstorm which lasted three days, and left the ground so thickly covered in snow that hedges and ditches were alike blotted out, and the country was one dazzling plain of sparkling white.

For one whole week, Sam Waller, the postman, was unable to make his journey with the letters; but as the Bodsam mail was not a heavy one, this was not a matter

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of such serious moment as the difficulty of getting food supplies to this out-of-the-way hill-hamlet.

By the end of the first week, nearly all the meal and flour was used up, and Mrs. Maythorn, who had generously come to the rescue of the straitened villagers, and baked batches of bread to supply the need, looked with dismay at her nearly empty flour bin, and thought of the barrel of meal that did not waste, and which had kept Elijah, and the widow of Zarephath, from starving. Beyond such provision as the farm-house could supply, no food remained in the village, and something must be done at once, or serious distress would be the result.

Accordingly, a council of ways and means was held at the blacksmith's forge, where the men who could not work, were glad to go, and lounge by the forge-fire.

It was of no use struggling through the drifts to Hazel-Lea, for, doubtless, the people there were as short of provisions as on Bodsam Green; and they must either steer

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their course for Winbury, four miles away, where there was a railway station, or for Blaydon, where the big flour mills would be sure to furnish forth supplies.

By common consent, it was determined to make an effort to reach Blaydon, and six men, headed by the blacksmith, started on the difficult journey, each man with a bag on his back, in which to bring back the flour.

Those left behind bestirred themselves in killing a pig, also supplied by Mr. Maythorn's generosity; but the cold was so intense that before the animal had been dead two hours, it was frozen hard as bricks, and there was no question of salting the meat, because of the necessity for its immediate use.

Yuppie had been a close prisoner all the time since the snow had come, but on the morning when the men had started for Blaydon, he cried so piteously to be taken to the forge, that Jack Bowles had hoisted him on to his back, and carried him along the dug-out path to the blacksmith's shop.

Here, Yuppie remained in great content,

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whilst his father went off with the other men in search of food.

But when the day wore on, the sun sank, and darkness fell, much anxiety began to be felt concerning the delayed return of the men. One or two women came to the forge to enquire of the blacksmith's apprentice if anything had been heard of them; and two men ventured as far as the bottom of Kingswold Hill, but returned, saying there was a drift there as high as a house, and they dared not risk their own lives in attempting to plunge through it.

This news spreading quickly among the cottages on the Green, awakened great consternation; and Yuppie's eldest sister Sally came flying down to the forge to carry him home to his supper, sobbing loudly that they were all poor fatherless orphans, and would have to go to the workhouse, directly the frost broke.

Her grief and lamentation were so infectious, that by the time the house was reached, Yuppie was crying too, not in the loud, stormy fashion of Sally, but with a dreary hopelessness of

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despair, that was enough to make any one's heart ache. Mr. Maythorn was in the cottage when they reached it, he had come to bring Mrs. Bowles a basket of swede turnips and potatoes, as the bread had given out earlier in the day.

Hearing Yuppie's wailing, and rightly guessing the effect it would probably have on the excitable Mrs. Bowles, he suggested taking the boy home to supper at the farm, and hoisting him on to his shoulder, went off through the snow, before Yuppie had time to make up his mind whether he wanted to go or not.

But the sight of the big kitchen at the farm, all aglow with fire and light, and filled with the savoury smell of the hot supper in process of cooking, effectually settled the question in Yuppie's mind, and went a long way towards cheering him up as well.

Mrs. Maythorn greeted him kindly, the little girls were friendly; and the supper, when ready, proved so good that Yuppie was quite in spirits again, and ready to laugh once more; when Mr. Maythorn, who had

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left the house to look after a cow that was ailing, returned with a grave face, and called to his wife and the servant to come and help him.

A few minutes later they returned, carrying between them the form of a man, with great patches of snow still clinging to him, his face pale and pinched, and his eyes fast shut.

Laying him on the floor, some distance from the fire, the farmer and his wife set about endeavouring to restore the unfortunate traveller to consciousness; and even Yuppie and the little girls were called to assist in rubbing the cold, lifeless hands and feet.

"Is he dead?" asked Yuppie, in a whisper, of Winnie Maythorn, who was close beside him.

"No; mother says she can feel his heart beating," the little girl answered, rubbing away at the hand she held.

"Are you afraid?" ventured Yuppie again, feeling very much of a coward himself, but not willing to admit it, unless she proved to be of the same disposition.

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But Winnie only tossed her head scornfully, refusing to reply even, to an insinuation so insulting to her courage; and Yuppie, who was cast in quite a different mould, crawled away from the prostrate figure, and hiding behind the mangle, which stood in a far corner of the room, prayed earnestly that, "God A'mighty would bring the deader to life again."

He prayed audibly, as he always did, having a strange belief that God could not hear unless one spoke aloud. And those busy about the restoration of the unconscious man on the floor, paused in their work to listen to the quaint petition, and to smile at each other over the mixed jumble of the sentences.

"God A'mighty, the man's as near a deader as ever was; make him alive again, please, because I'm so scared. And don't let my faather be a deader neither, cos I don't want ter go to the workus, where they only gets bread and cheese for dinner Sundays, as they tells me."

Winnie Maythorn stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to keep the laugh from

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escaping, but her mother held up a warning finger, shaking her head with a reproachful air, as she whispered: "Hush, Winnie, those who pray in faith are always heard of their Father, however queer their petitions may sound."

Yuppie heard the whispering, but paid no heed to it, being absorbed in praying: "I'm a Christian now, God A'mighty, leastways as near one as a little boy can be. I don't steal the sugar now, nor yet say as I've bin doin' a thing when I hasn't. So if it's only Christians' prayers as You listens to, may be You'll 'ear mine this once, cos I'm tryin' all I know. Amen."

The last word was hardly out of Yuppie's mouth, when Sally Bowles arrived at the back door, to say that the men had all safely returned, dragging with them a big sledge laden with flour and meal; they had not come by the Kingswold Hill road at all, but had kept to the open fields, as the drifts there were neither so deep nor so dangerous.

At this good news, Yuppie crept out from behind the mangle, to join in the rejoicings,

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his face happy and radiant, and his whole bearing self-satisfied and triumphant, for there was not the slightest doubt in his mind, that he had prayed the men safely home again.

The man on the floor was reviving too, he had opened his eyes, and said something in a feeble voice to Mrs. Maythorn; thus Yuppie considered he had good and sufficient cause for believing his prayers to have received immediate answers.

Sally had come to take him home, and mounting on to her sturdy young shoulders, he was carried out into the crisp, cold air of the night, where the stars peeped through the dark sky, and the white earth shone weird and still under the thousands of tiny star-candles.

"My, Yuppie, but it's fine to be you, to be taken to supper at the maaster's; what might you have had to eat, say?" enquired Sally, as she trudged with her burden through the snow.

But the self-important small boy considered this piece of feminine curiosity beneath his dignity to answer, and merely remarking that

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the supper was good enough, relapsed into a silence from which he refused to be roused, until home was reached again.

Jack Bowles was sitting by the fire, and his wife was crying over him, as one given back to her from the dead, when Sally entered with Yuppie on her back.

The sight of his mother in tears, damped the exaltation of the small boy's mood a little, and a terrible sense of responsibility crept over him, as he wondered whether God would have brought the men back in safety if he had forgotten to pray for their speedy return. Under the influence of this doubt, he was very quiet and subdued, and when Sally put him to bed, he made her go outside of the room, and shut the door, whilst he said his prayers, because he did not choose for her to know how uncertain he felt on this particular subject.

When his praying was done, he called her back again, she being his willing slave, and accustomed to his imperious mandates.

"Wot's yer wantin' now, boy? wasn't yer grand supper fillin' enough?" she asked, with

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envy behind the gibe, for she considered it very hard that Yuppie should have so much honour, whilst she was left out in the cold.

"When are yer coming to bed, Sally?" he asked, insinuatingly; "an' where's the others?"

"Oh, you're afraid, are you?" she retorted, understanding now why he had called her back.

"Where's the others?" demanded Yuppie again, looking at her with an anxious face.

"Polly an' Emma, oh, they are in at Mrs. Epps's; her baby is main bad to-night, an' they thinks as it's a goin' to die."

"Won't you come, then, Sally, it's main dark an' still in 'ere all alone?" he pleaded, with a quivering lip.

She burst into a loud laugh. "That's a good un, Yuppie Bowles, you calls yersel a Christian, like faather, an' then afraid to find yersel alone in the dark for ten minutes, ha, ha, ha;" and running out of the room, she slammed the door behind her, her mocking laugh resounding along the passage as she went.

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Left alone, Yuppie dived down underneath the bed-clothes, smarting under his sister's taunt, and quivering with fear, for the darkness was a very real terror to him.

But sleep soon sealed his eyes, dulling his fears, and he knew no more until the morning, when he heard his father saying to his mother, that the weather had changed, and a thaw had set in.

With this change of weather continuing, the snow rapidly disappeared, and in less than a week, the butcher, the baker, the grocer, and the postman were once more able to make their way to Bodsam Green.

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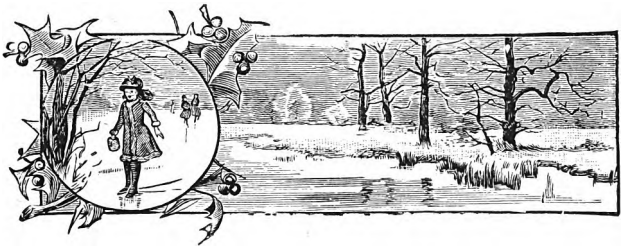

CHAPTER VIII.

A DREADFUL DISAPPOINTMENT.

IT was that same winter, though some weeks later, that it occurred to Yuppie to pray that his feet might be made straight, like those of Spider Coombs and Jacky Epps.

He had been to a meeting that the Methodists had held in the cottage of Mrs. Hawkins, soon after the new year came in; and a woman from London had been preaching on faith, illustrating her arguments with anecdotes of the most wonderful cures that had taken place among the sick people of her acquaintance, who had had faith

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enough to believe that they might be made quite well.

All this, Yuppie drank in with eager interest, sitting open-mouthed, amongst the crowd of stolid neighbours, who seemed quite unimpressed by these marvellous stories of healing. Never had sermon seemed so short to him, or meeting hour slipped away so quickly: when it was over, and the congregation were departing out into the damp darkness of the January night, he struggled to reach the woman who had preached, in order to question her more closely concerning his own case. But she had gone upstairs to pray with Mrs. Hawkins' old grandmother, who was ill in bed, and before she returned, Yuppie's father had started for home, with the small boy an unwilling captive on his shoulder.

But if Yuppie had been whisked off home in this fashion, he had no intention of going to bed, until matters had been put in train for the accomplishment of his desire, and facing round on his father, who had slipped him from his perch on to the table, he

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shouted in great glee as he kicked out his poor misshapen feet: "I'm goin' ter 'ave straight feet to-morrow, I am, an' you've got ter 'elp me pray for 'em."

"Bless the boy, wot's he drivin' at now, I wonder?" ejaculated Mrs. Bowles in great amazement, as she stared at her son.

"You've bin to meetin', an' you've heard the preachin', an' 'ow folks is cured as 'ave got faith enough to believe they can be made better," retorted Yuppie, turning on her, reproachfully.

"Yes, yes, but they wasn't like you, poor little laddie," said Jack Bowles, choking back an almost overmastering sob, as he looked at the ugly club-shaped feet, which Yuppie was energetically kicking out.

"They was cripples, some of 'em, she said so, an' worse nor I am, seein' they couldn't walk without crutches, while I can get along very well with two sticks. An' if they could get cured, wot's to hinder me?" he answered, almost defiantly.

Mrs. Bowles sat down on a chair, and began to cry hysterically. Yuppie's deformity

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was a sore trouble to her; if she could have changed with him, giving him her straight, capable feet, and taking his weak, twisted ones, how gladly she would have done it, rejoicing with true mother-love in the sacrifice. But this might not be, and she could only grieve over what she could not alter.

"There's cripples, an' cripples, boy," said Jack Bowles, scratching his head, thoughtfully; "an' I take it, as theirs was a different sort o' lameness from your'n."

"Cripples is cripples; if God A'mighty can cure one sort, He can cure all," said Yuppie, dogmatically; "an' you've got ter pray for me to-night, as my feet may be made straight by the mornin'. I haven't not got no straight shoes, but I can borrer Polly's best ones, till you can 'ave a pair made for me."

"We'll pray for yer, boy, but don't you go for bein' too much set on 'aving your feet put right; miracles ain't wrought like that in these days, an' the Lord don't always see fit to give us all we asks for."

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"If yer 'aven't got no more faith than that, I reckon it ain't much use for yer to pray at all," said Yuppie, with a look of sorrowful indignation at his father.

"Oh we'll try, an' who knows but wot God A'mighty might work a miracle for your poor feet, but oh, I'm afraid He won't; I'm dreadful afraid He won't," sobbed poor Mrs. Bowles, rocking backwards and forwards in great distress of mind.

"Then it's no use yer prayin', not a bit; I'll do it myself. I've got faith if you ain't," he said, bitterly; then turning to where his three sisters stood in a group, staring at him in stolid bewilderment, he called, petulantly: "Sally, come an' put me ter bed will yer, an' Polly, when you takes off your best shoes to-night, put 'em at the foot of my bed, you'd best put your stockings there too, they'll fit straight feet, better than mine I reckon."

Sally came forward, helping him down from the table, without a word, and when the two were gone, Jack Bowles crossed

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over to his weeping wife, and laid his hand on her bowed shoulders.

"Don't take it so 'ard, missus," he said, softly; "the Lord has His ways o' making things up to folks, an' 'appen Yuppie won't be so diserpinted as we're afraid on."

But Mrs. Bowles refused to be consoled, sobbing far on into the night, because of the heavy dispensation of the Lord, which had ordered that her only son should go through life a halting cripple.

Yuppie was jubilant with delight, and radiant with hope; he sent his clumsy shoes flying to the far corner of the room, and his sticks after them. He made his stockings into a ball, and pelted his sisters with them. Then settling himself on his bed, his mood sobered from wild uproariousness to confident reverence, and he began to pray.

His three sisters stood by the bed to hear his petitions, and were profoundly impressed by his gift in prayer, while Sally began to cry, under the belief that Yuppie was too good to live, like Mrs. Epps's

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baby, who had died of croup on Christmas day.

When his prayer was ended, Yuppie lay down in bed, with a solemn awe stealing over him; he had an idea that an angel would be sent to his bedside that night to straighten his feet whilst he slept; and he was just a little afraid lest he might wake to catch a glimpse of a form in shining raiment, to hear a whirring of white wings as the celestial visitant departed, and to see the gleam of heavenly splendour lighting up the poor chamber, which he shared with his sisters.

But the night passed on, the dark hours were slowly ticked off by the clock in the outer room, until the father rose from his bed, to go forth to his daily toil once again.

Then an exceedingly bitter cry was heard, which smote the heart of Jack Bowles like a knife-thrust, and awoke Mrs. Bowles from the troubled slumber into which she had drifted after her long weeping.

"It's Yuppie, missus, go to him, will yer?

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I can't," said the man, and when he was dressed, he went away out of the house, breakfastless, to his work, because of that sore pain at his heart.

But even his mother could not comfort the poor boy, who raved like one distraught, to find that his faith had borne no fruit, and that his feet were still club-shaped and deformed.

In her distress at his state of mind, Mrs. Bowles was ready to promise him anything and everything he might happen to desire, which it was in her power to procure for him.

But Yuppie desired nothing then, and after the first wild burst of his grieving was past, he turned his face to the wall, and refused to even speak to his mother and sisters, who hung about him in anxious love and pity.

He would not get up, and all day long he stayed in his bed, in a condition of misery and revolt, impossible to describe. He had trusted in God, and God had failed him—so he believed. And hardening his

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heart, he would have nothing further to do with prayers, or religion at all.

But how dark the world was now, and how lonely was he, Yuppie Bowles, without God for his Father, or the thought of heaven as his future home!

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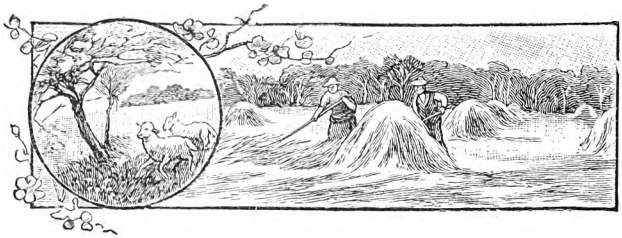

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE BITTER—SWEET.

ALL through the remaining weeks of winter, and the lingering days of spring, Yuppie's revolt lasted; he would not go to the cottage meetings, which from time to time the Methodists held on Bodsam Green; if his father bade Sally get the Bible down, and read a chapter, for the benefit of the parents who could not read at all, he would shuffle out of the room, and not return until the reading was over.

How hard a trial this was to his father and mother, no one but themselves could

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know; through the strain of it poor Mrs. Bowles crept her way to the foot of the Cross, and in praying for Yuppie, found salvation for herself; after which, she and her husband prayed more earnestly than ever, that God might soften the heart of their cripple boy.

There is no unbeliever so stubborn in his unbelief as a child. His reasoning, such as it is, is dogmatic, and downright, and the greater the effort to show him the error of his way, the more resolutely does he adhere to his own opinion. Probably had Yuppie been left to himself, a fortnight of anger, and doubt, would have worn out his puny rebellion, and then a few kind, judicious words would have enabled him to see things in a different light. But his friends lacked this wisdom, and morning, noon, and night was the small boy wheedled, coaxed, and prayed over, until he came to regard himself in the light of a hero, and gave himself airs accordingly.

This would all have been immensely funny had it had regard to any other subject, as

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it was, it was infinitely pathetic, and day by day the child's heart grew farther from Christ, and his defiance waxed stronger, and more intense.

As was only natural, news of Yuppie's mental attitude went round among the neighbours, reaching even to the ears of Mrs. Maythorn, who looked very grave, but ventured no opinion whatever on the subject, though that evening when her day's work was done, and the two little girls gone to bed, she sat down, and wrote a letter to her uncle, the lame man; and her husband approving of it, the letter was posted the next day.

The spring was tardy in its arrival that year, but when it did come, it came all at once; and the flowers which had been ready and waiting for its appearance, burst into blossom in a day, so that the woods and hedgerows about Bodsam Green were a sight to see.

Yuppie lived out of doors now, when he was not shut up in school that is, but he did not get all the happiness he desired

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from the beauties of nature, because of the soreness at his heart. He had gone off with the other children one sunny day in the middle of April, to pick primroses in the lanes; but tiring sooner than they, had lagged behind, finally sitting down on a bank to rest, whilst the others went on without him.

Presently there was a sound of wheels in the lane, and looking up, he saw a cart advancing, the horse being driven by Mrs. Maythorn's uncle, the lame man from Wellindge.

To his surprise, the horse and cart came to a standstill in front of where he was sitting, and leaning forward, the lame man asked him if he would like to come and take a drive with him.

Yuppie's face became radiant, but as quickly grew overcast again. "I can't get up there, cos o' my feet," he said, sorely.

"Poor boy, and I can't get down because of my leg. But don't you think if you stood close to the step, I could pull you up with my arm?"

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For answer, Yuppie scrambled down the bank, and came to the side of the cart.

"I'm ready," he said, briefly, his face aglow at the treat in prospect.

The lame man's horse seemed to understand that something unusual was on hand, and waited patiently enough, whilst its master pulled Yuppie up on to the step, and from thence to the cart itself.

Then they set slowly forward again, the horse going at a walking pace now, for the lane at this part was hilly and steep. The lame man was very nice to Yuppie, and talked to him for a time about the sunshine and the flowers, and such small matters, until Yuppie lost his first shyness, and began to feel at home with him.

"It was very good of God to make the world so beautiful, wasn't it?" said the lame man, pointing with his whip to a bit of the bank at the side of the road, that was all starred with primroses, whilst the slope of the wood beyond was blue with blue-bells.

"God ain't good," burst out Yuppie in quick, passionate retort.

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"What makes you think He isn't good?" asked the lame man with a placid face.

"I asked Him to put my feet straight and He wouldn't," replied the boy, thrusting out his poor deformed feet, that the other might see how ugly they were.

"Supposing now, that God had done as you asked, and put them straight like those of other people, what would you have done?"

"I should have been pleased with Him," retorted Yuppie, with such a funny air of importance, that the corners of the lame man's mouth twitched in spite of himself.

"But perhaps God saw that you would be happier in the end, and that you would grow up to be a better man, if you had to hobble and creep, instead of being able to jump and run," he said so gravely, that Yuppie looked up to see if he was angry.

"The Bible says if yer prays in faith, yer gets what yer wants, an' that's 'ow I did it. I throwed away my shoes, too, but it didn't make no difference," said Yuppie.

"I knew a boy once," went on the lame

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man, "he was a little older than you, but no wiser, and he was strong and could run, and jump too; but he was not always good; sometimes when his father and mother were not by to hear him, he would say wicked words, because he thought it made him look big and manly, and he learned to smoke, and to drink, until it seemed that he was fast becoming a very bad boy indeed. Then something happened to him, he fell ill, and people thought he would die; but he did not die, only the illness settled in his leg, so that he was never able to use that foot and leg again. At first, he was very sad about it, and angry too, and said that he would rather have died. But after a time, when the first bitterness of his affliction had passed, he began to hear the voice of God speaking to him in quiet ways."

"How could he 'ear it, if he didn't die?" broke in Yuppie, who was listening intently.

"God speaks in so many different ways, any one can hear Him, if they only care to listen; and sometimes when they won't hearken to His voice, He sends some affliction

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upon them in order to make them attend when He speaks. It was so with this boy that I am telling you of, he wouldn't listen to the voice of the Lord, when he was able to run about like other boys; but when the time came that he had to hop painfully along with the aid of a stout crutch, he heard the voice of God speaking to him."

"Wot did it say?" cried Yuppie, eagerly.

The lame man hesitated a minute, and then he said: "The voice said to him, 'Thomas Harwood, I want you for My servant; I have sent you a lame leg, that by weakness you may glorify Me; I have sent you trouble, that through it, you may call on Me to help you.'"

"Was it yersel, then?" asked Yuppie with a start of surprise.

The lame man nodded, his eyes were full of tears too, and something seemed to have stirred his emotions so that he could not speak.

"Wot did yer say to Him, to God A'mighty, I mean?" asked Yuppie again; but now his

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voice had an awed sound, and he looked half-frightened.

"I didn't want to be His servant at first, because, like you, I thought He was unkind not to give me what I wanted, and let me be strong and well, but after that, I was able to say: 'If Thou wilt help me, Gracious Master, then will I be Thy servant, and try to glorify Thee, with my life until I die.'"

Yuppie burst into a great fit of crying, sobbing out between his tears: "And I wouldn't 'ave nothin' ter do with Him, cos He wouldn't put my feet straight."

"Perhaps He made them crooked, because He wanted you to glorify Him too," suggested the lame man, gently.

"How shall I know, will I hear Him callin' of me?" asked Yuppie with an anxious look. The hardness was melting from his heart, now that he was beginning dimly to see how big might be the purpose that lay behind.

"You will hear Him call you, if you listen, my boy, only see to it that you do listen, by living very close to Him, and it

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may be that your poor twisted feet will walk firmly along the narrow way of life eternal, and so shall the bitter trial of your affliction yield you the sweet reward of a blameless and useful life."

As Mr. Harwood ceased speaking, they reached Yuppie's home on Bodsam Green, and Mrs. Bowles ran out of her cottage to lift him down from the cart, whilst the lame man drove on to the farm.

Yuppie never saw him again, for he died quite suddenly three days later; but the small boy never forgot that drive in the cart, and the talk which accompanied it; and he set himself to listen from that time forward, for the call to service which Mr. Harwood had spoken of.

* * * * * *

Years have passed since then, and many of the inhabitants of Bodsam Green have joined the lame man, in the land where there is no pain or deformity; and many fresh babies have come to take the places of the children who in their turn have merged into men and women.

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Yuppie Bowles is a man now, and lives in a cottage near the school; he has a board over the door with his name, Arthur John Bowles, painted on it, with the further information that he is a shoemaker, and will make and mend your foot-gear, with quickness, and dispatch.

But the board does not tell you the most interesting fact about him, which is—The voice of God did call him, and as he was listening, he heard it, and was able to respond. The neighbours say of him, that the cripple cobbler is making a straight track to the Celestial City, and not content to go alone, he is persuading others to go with him also.

Thus, has Yuppie Bowles learned out of the bitterness of his denied life to glorify God.

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THE LAND BEYOND THE FLOOD.

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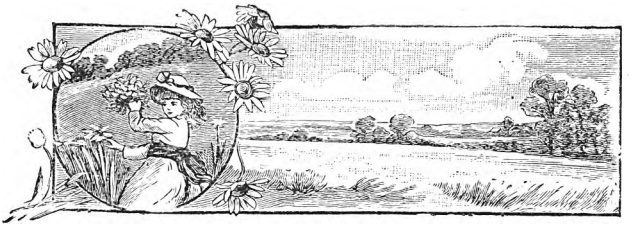

THE LAND BEYOND THE FLOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE STREET PREACHER.

THE burning August sunshine was pouring into Paradise Row, causing the various rubbish heaps to reek and swelter in the intense heat; whilst from the gutter came odours more powerful than pleasant, to salute the noses of the inhabitants, or to make a chance visitor hurry quickly away from such an insalubrious neighbourhood.

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In front of the last house but one, for Paradise Row was a *cul-de-sac*, sat Rowley File, his hands thrust into his ragged trousers' pockets; his back comfortably propped against the house wall, his legs stretched out across the dusty path.

He was not a handsome boy. In fact, he was very much the reverse; his hair was red, he had an awkward squint, and his pale unwholesome face was plentifully bespattered with freckles.

Rowley File was by trade, or profession, a newspaper vendor, his morning and evening hours being spent in the active prosecution of his calling. But the afternoon always brought him two or three hours of leisure, which were devoted with strict impartiality to loafing and mischief.

On this particular afternoon no mischief of especial attractiveness was to the fore, and so Rowley decided to loaf, and passed the time comfortably enough between sleeping and waking; and, for a wonder, the Row was quiet enough just then, to make a nap possible, the heat of the day having

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driven the women inside their houses, or else to the more airy street beyond, and they had taken the babies with them.

There was no baby in Rowley's own home at this time, for his mother being unusually drunk one Saturday night, a few weeks before, had, in her sleep, rolled over upon her hapless infant, squeezing the breath of life from its tiny body. There had been a great outcry next day, for although babies were sufficiently plentiful in Paradise Row, the people were kind-hearted—when they were not drunk—and sorry for the untimely ending of Mrs. File's youngest-born. An inquest was held, of course, and this was followed by the funeral, towards the expense of which all the wage-earning portion of the Row subscribed, and when it was over, adjourned to the public-house, to get drunk in company.

But the baby's death was stale gossip by this time, and Rowley slept and waked in his comfortable ease without giving so much as a thought to what at the time had been a mighty excitement. Then the shadows

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began to lengthen, and the close stuffiness of the narrow court less oppressive.

"Nearly time to be movin', I reckon," muttered Rowley to himself, in a regretful tone, as he stretched his legs yet further across the pavement, and yawned, lazily.

Just then his quick ears caught the sound of some unusual stir at the other end of the Row, followed by the clear, raised tones of a woman's voice.

"Lor, I do believe it's one o' them 'ere preachin' gals!" he exclaimed, delightedly, scrambling up from his dusty lair, and making off with all speed for the scene of action at the end of the Row.

A house stood there, with four steps before its door, and the preacher had taken her stand on the topmost one, with her back against the door. She was not young, like most of the preaching ladies, who, by dint of much persuasion and eloquence, endeavoured to reform the straying sheep of the Paradise fold, but a woman nearing middle-age, wearing no distinctive garb of office, but bearing in her

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quiet, thoughtful face, the marks of earnest purpose and patient determination; a person not to be trifled with, the bystanders decided, nevertheless they tried it on.

She was already surrounded by a considerable crowd, for in Paradise Row a congregation was easy to gain. And her hearers were attentive, though somewhat critical, and determined withal to have matters arranged according to their own sense of fitness, so far, at least, as the programme of the service was concerned.

Just as Rowley reached the outer edge of the momentarily increasing throng, the preacher was commencing a short prayer, which proceeding was promptly vetoed by most of her hearers.

"Here, stow that gab, missis," said a rough-looking man, with a bull-dog kind of face. "Cawn't you sing us a bit? Somethin' lively, yer know, to sort o' wake us up."

"Yes, I can sing, if you like that best," answered the preacher, with ready cheerfulness, and in no way disturbed by the objections raised against her attempt at public prayer.

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"That's right, troll us a lay, and I will dance an accompaniment," shrieked a very dishevelled female, clad in flaunting attire, and who had spent a greater part of the day in lounging in the bar of "The Green Acorn," which house of entertainment stood at the end of Paradise Row.

"An' I'll assist the lidy with the choruses. I'm good at that sort o' thing, I am," called out Rowley, as he struggled with might and main to force his way to the centre of the crowd.

"Yer cawn't sing, sonny," objected the red-faced landlord of "The Green Acorn," who had come out to swell the throng, and see the fun; for, as a rule, there was always fun—of a sort—when street preachers came to Paradise Row.

"Cawn't I?" and Rowley emitted a loud, doleful howl, as a specimen of his vocal powers, and had his ears boxed for his pains by the "lidy wot kept the coal-shop."

A loud burst of merriment greeted this sally, and its prompt punishment; and when it died away, the quiet-faced woman on the

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top of the steps, said in an even voice: "I am much obliged for your offered help, but you will find that I shall do best if left to myself; so if you do not want me to leave off, you will please not disturb me."

There was so much determined power in the woman's quiet speech, that the crowd were quick to feel, and be influenced by it, in the direction of better order.

"Shut up your row, young un, or I'll stow my fist down your throttle," snarled the man of the bull-dog aspect, turning upon Rowley File, who, dodging the coal-shop lady, had just given vent to another howl of even greater magnitude than the first.

"Stop yer own row, 'twas yer as begun it," screamed Rowley, in a high state of delight, as he danced and cut capers, with no regard whatever for the feelings or the toes of the people on whose feet he trod.

The bull-dog man directed a rotten turnip with unerring aim at Rowley's head, but that juvenile dodging with great dexterity, the turnip took the red-faced landlord neatly on

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the nose, causing him to yell with rage and disgust.

Unheeding, or at least undaunted by this spirited aside, the preacher commenced to sing, choosing such hymns as were most likely to prove popular with the audience for whom she catered in things spiritual. "Hold the Fort," "Whosoever Will," and "The Land Beyond the Flood," for awhile held the crowd in a state of delighted enchantment, for she had a full, rich voice, and knew how to use it. But presently she stopped abruptly, for she had not come to Paradise Row for the mere sake of amusing a throng of loungers, and her tone was full of purpose as she said:

"And now that I have been singing to please you, I wish you to listen to please me, whilst I tell you something about 'The Land Beyond the Flood,' and the kind of people who will be likely to go there. It is a beautiful place to live in, that 'Land beyond the Flood,' and the people that dwell there feel neither hunger nor thirst, they neither shiver with cold, nor droop from the fierceness

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of the heat; and they need no gas lamps, because it is never dark."

"They uses the electric light then, I s'pose, ma'am?" queried a facetious boy, cutting a lively caper in recognition of his own wit.

"Yes," responded the preacher, quietly, seeming in no way disturbed or annoyed at the frequent interruptions to which she was subjected. "They use in that country the electric light of the Saviour's glory; the Saviour of the world, who, because He pitied us, came away from that bright home, down to our dark, cold earth to live among men, and to die a shameful death, in order that we might be fit to go, and share His home in the world where no night ever comes."

Rowley began to feel rather interested, in spite of himself. He had heard street preachers in plenty before, and regarded their performances as a legitimate opportunity for a lark, as a rule. But there was something unusual about this woman's mode of procedure; she hadn't a big, loud voice, or a demonstrative swagger like the young men

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from the Chorley Institute, nor was she grand and precise like the curate from Saint Mark's. She sang so sweetly too, and in a way that fixed the tune and the words also, in the heads and hearts of her hearers.

Her talking was just on the level of Rowley's intelligence likewise; and there was no fear of her words shooting over the heads of her congregation, for all that she stood on the steps, whilst they only stood on the ground.

And how good-natured she was too! A drunken woman climbed up beside her and tried to drown the preaching with a ribald song, and many tipsy gesticulations; but she only stayed the crazy performances with a gentle pat on the arm, and a quiet, "One at a time, if you please, sister; and it's my turn first."

This was immensely pleasing to the listeners, and they cheered lustily, whilst the "lidy wot kept the coal-shop" mounted the steps, and dragged the drunken woman down, rather damaging her garments in the attempt, but securing a temporary peace for the preacher.

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By this time, Rowley had succeeded in getting quite close to the steps, though he had received a good many kicks and cuffs *en route*, and he gazed up into the woman's face with grave curiosity and wonder, as from enumerating the joys and pleasures awaiting those who sought to enter that bright "Land beyond the Flood," she went on to tell of the vices and evil habits that must be overcome, before any one could gain admission to that fair clime.

"Thou shalt not steal;" clear and courageous the words rang out over the heads of the audience, whose chief avocation in life—most of them—was the seeking after what was not their own.

An angry murmur of disapproval ran round the crowd, but no one ventured on an open protest, for the preacher had cowed the rebellious element in the throng surrounding her by sheer force of character, and the assertion of her stronger will.

"Thou shalt not steal," she repeated again, her penetrating voice echoing right over the crowd, and along the dreary confines of the

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Row. "That kind, pitying Saviour, who left His bright home, to come and die for poor, sin-stained men and women, is the great Lord of Heaven too, and He has no room there for pick-pockets and crib-crackers. If you want to go to Heaven, you must leave off cadging; and those of you who are cleverest in taking what is not your own, will have the most to unlearn, before you are fit to be received into that home of light."

Six o'clock chimed out from the tower of Saint Mark's at this moment, and Rowley dared linger no longer to listen to the preacher and her wonderful sermon. So turning round, he fought his way back to the outskirts of the crowd again, receiving many a blow and cuff on the ears as he went, which marks of distinction, it is needless to say, he returned with interest to the donors.

Once clear of the throng, he settled his frowzy cap more firmly down upon his yet more frowzy head, and despite the heat, broke into a quick run, for it was close on paper time; and Rowley was bound to be

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punctual, or find some luckier rival stealing his customers, and pocketing their cash.

He was just in time, and in the rush and hurry of his evening work, the words of the preacher faded from his mind.

But later on—and when he least desired it—remembrance of them came to him again.

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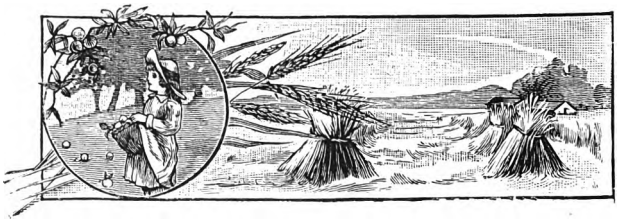

CHAPTER II.

GOD'S ELECTRICITY.

THAT night there was a heavy thunderstorm. Rowley woke in a fright at the noise of crashing thunder, and huddled closer to the two brothers, and one sister, with whom he shared the ragged, lumpy mattress in the corner of their one poor room, while the father and mother slept on a broken bedstead in the opposite corner. But huddle close down as he might, and shut his eyes so tightly that they ached with the strain, he was not able to shut out the vivid glare of the lightning, which kept the poor close room in a constant flicker of blinding light.

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The noise of crying, frightened children mingled with the raging of the elements, and Rowley's father, sitting up in bed, swore fiercely at the young ones for adding their share to the disturbances of the night, but his mother slumbered on in drunken unconsciousness of anything out of the common.

For nearly two hours the storm lasted, dying away at the end of that time almost as quickly as it had arisen, and the other children dropped to sleep again, whilst the man's oaths also dwindled to drowsy growls, finally dying away like the storm, only, unlike the storm, they had not purified the atmosphere.

But Rowley could not sleep, he had been too thoroughly scared, and longed for some hole in which to hide, where thunder and lightning might never penetrate. So he tossed, and turned, and tumbled, unable to find any position easy enough to lie in for more than five minutes at a stretch, and totally unable to banish from his mind the shivering terror inspired by the storm.

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In the morning every one was talking of the damage that had been done. A big tree in Saint Mark's churchyard had been struck by lightning, the massive trunk being riven from summit to base, and the foliage withered and scorched by the passing of the electric fire. And in Paradise Row itself, a chimney had suffered in a similar way, the iron rod which supported it being twisted and crumpled as though it was only a piece of thin wire.

Needless to say, Rowley was abroad early, in order to survey the wreckage, his hands, as usual, encased in his ragged pockets.

After seeing all there was to be seen in Paradise Row, and paddling for a time in the pools of storm-water collected in the gutters, he started off to Saint Mark's, filled with a morbid curiosity to see the tree that had suffered so heavily.

"I wonder now, wot makes the lightning come?" he was saying to himself, as he stood on the flagstones of the church path, gazing through the iron railings at the wrecked tree.

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"It is the hand of God, ruling the forces of nature," said a voice close behind him.

Rowley turned sharply; he had been so busy looking at the tree, and pondering the subject in his own mind, as to be quite oblivious to approaching footsteps.

A tall, white-haired man was standing on the path almost close beside him; a gentleman, as Rowley was quick to see, and he doffed his ragged cap in respectful salute.

"Yer was sayin' somethin', sir?" he asked, in a puzzled tone.

"I was answering your question, boy; didn't you know that you spoke aloud?"

"It's likely, it's a way o' mine. But I ain't fer seein' yer meanin' now?" and Rowley's face looked more dubious still.

"Don't you know that the hand of God rules everything?" asked the old gentleman, kindly.

Rowley shook his head disapprovingly, as though he objected to this assertion of the universal rule of the Creator. "Not down our way He don't, leastways not as I've ever seen. They tells yer about Him in churches,

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an' chapels, an' the preachin' chaps wot come into our Row yarns about Him too, but lor' bless yer, it ain't nawthin' but talk."

"Are you sure?" asked the old gentleman, fixing Rowley with a steady gaze.

"Positive. Arst any one in our row, an' they'll tell yer the sime. Mister Rafferty, as runs 'The Green Acorn,' the lidy what keeps the coal-shop, Bull Tom, or Nance Kitchen; none in our Row never goes ter church nor chapel, 'cept there's coals or soup ter be given away."

"Perhaps not, but that does not alter the fact that He does rule; what about last night, did you hear nothing of God in your Row then?"

Rowley shivered; the memory of last night's terror was very present with him yet, and he would have preferred not to discuss the matter just then, but there was no sense in being disobliging to a gentleman, who might be glad to buy a paper some day, even if he wasn't good for a copper or two at the present time.

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"It thundered orful, an' the lightning, well it was blazes!" and he shivered again.

"Just what I said, you did hear God in your Row last night, and beheld a manifestation of His power too; but that is only a very small, a very insignificant example of His might. I have seen greater works of God than that, boy," the old gentleman said, impressively.

"Have yer now, if I might tike the liberty o' arstin' wot they wos?" and Rowley touched his cap again, eager for information, which might—if judiciously retailed—make him an individual of note in the Row for a week to come.

"I will tell you with pleasure," said the old gentleman, briskly. "You think it a great thing, don't you, for fire from heaven to fall and split that tree from top to bottom, but I have seen God touch a man's heart, and the man who just before had been swaggering about declaring there was no such being as God, and no such places as heaven or hell, fell prostrate on the ground calling out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'"

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"Wos it lightning?" asked Rowley, in breathless interest.

"No, for the sky was as clear and calm as it is now, there was no sign of storm, or even of wind," replied the old gentleman.

"Did it kill 'im?" gasped Rowley.

"Oh no, it helped him to live; he was very miserable, and dreadfully afraid for days, thinking that every breath he drew might be his last, and he kept on crying out, 'God be merciful to me,' until at last there came a great peace and happiness into his heart, and from that very hour he began to live a new life."

"Oh, it's religion yer means!" exclaimed Rowley with sudden comprehension, and a strong intonation of disgust.

"Exactly, and don't you think it is a much more wonderful thing to be able to change men's hearts and lives, than it is to split a tree down the middle?" demanded the old gentleman.

"I dunno." Rowley shifted uneasily now from foot to foot, and was inwardly meditating flight, being only deterred from

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putting his meditations into practice by prudential considerations, mentally arguing that if the old gentleman was intending to give him a penny, it was a thousand pities to thwart his benevolent intention.

"But I do. You look at that tree, it has always stood still in that same place; if the wind blew it to one side, it returned to its proper position when the wind had passed. But a man isn't like that, he goes here, and he goes there, no one can tell what he will do next; and yet God is strong enough to follow him in all his wanderings, to bend and turn his nature, and to change him from a lying, thieving, stealing vagabond into a wholesome, clean-souled man."

Rowley stared hard at the tree, he did not understand much of this talk about God's power over the hearts of men, though he was shrewd and cute like most of his class in ordinary things.

"They talks like that in churches an' chapels, an' sich; an' she was goin' on about

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it yesterday at the end of our Row," said Rowley, with the air of one superior to it all.

"Who is *she?*" asked the old gentleman.

"A party wot wos preachin' in the Row yesterday. She wos a good sort she wos, though there wasn't no fun, as yer may say, goin' on, like there is when them chaps from the Salvation Army comes round with trumpets an' tambourines. I had ter come away before it was all over, but I heard her a sayin' as He wouldn't have nothin' ter do with thieves, crib-crackers, an' sich."

"What is a crib-cracker?" asked the old gentleman, not so much from lack of knowledge apparently, as from a desire to hear Rowley's definition of the term.

"He's a bloke as breaks inter houses an' shops; yer've never seen one perhaps?" and Rowley grinned at the bare idea of such appalling ignorance.

"Oh yes, I have, but it is many years ago now. I was chaplain at a prison, and then I knew a great number of them, as you may suppose."

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"An' God won't have nothin' ter do with crib-crackers?" persisted Rowley.

"God has no room in His beautiful heaven for those who break His laws, and dishonour His name; He has said, 'Thou shalt not steal,'" replied the old gentleman.

"Lor, now, I'm blest if that wasn't egzactly what the party said," broke in Rowley, with great admiration for what he styled "the old cove's cuteness."

But again the church clock reminded him that it was imperative for him to be moving on, so he said, reluctantly: "I'm in the piper line, an' it's nearly time ter be startin', so I'll 'ave ter say good mornin', sir."

"Good morning to you, my boy, and see here, I often take a walk round by Saint Mark's in the early part of the day, and if you have a few minutes to spare to-morrow, or the next day, find your way round here, and we will have another talk."

To this, Rowley consented readily enough, hoping the gentleman would put his hand in his pocket, and produce a "brown," but he

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did nothing of the kind, only bade him a pleasant good morning, and walked away.

Rowley stared after him for a moment, and was just turning round to scurry away to get his papers, when the old gentleman stopped suddenly, and wheeling round, called out to him:

"Boy, boy, come here a minute."

Away flew Rowley, nothing loth, thinking that the old gentleman had at last remembered to be benevolent.

But he was doomed to disappointment, for when he came within hearing distance, the old gentleman said in his slow, solemn tone: "Don't forget what I told you about God's electricity. Sometimes He works by thunder and lightning, you know; but sometimes you can't see the flash of His power that strikes you down."

Rowley was very quiet over his work that morning, and though he bawled his wares with customary vigour, "Times, Standard, Daily Noos, Telegraph, Mornin' Leader. Excitin' capshure of a burglar in Soho. Thrillin' details of the storm!" he did not

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chaff his professional rivals, nor show any inclination to take a rise out of unoffending passers-by.

He was thinking of God's electricity, and dreading lest its power should find him out.

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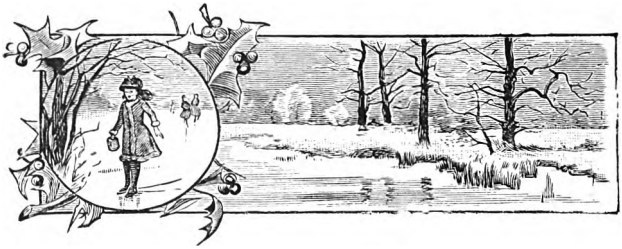

CHAPTER III.

CRIB-CRACKING.

ROWLEY did not keep his tryst in Saint Mark's churchyard, though morning after morning found the old gentleman pacing the flagstones, and looking eagerly for the boy who never came.

Meanwhile, Rowley, on his part, was taking great precautions to avoid his new friend, and in the pursuance of his daily calling, stood ever on the alert to flee at the approach of a venerable stranger, who in any way reminded him of the old gentleman who had talked to him of God's electricity.

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For why was he so afraid?

The old gentleman stood to this poor untaught denizen of the streets in the light of a conscience, a monitor who could distinguish between the evil and good, in his motives and actions; and just then, Rowley had no desire to find himself within reach of such a monitor.

There was mischief afloat in Paradise Row, real, serious mischief, with a spice of danger in it, to give it zest.

Jim Craggs and Tom Smith were the prime movers in the undertaking; big fellows they were, well acquainted with the magistrates' court, where they had appeared often enough to answer charges of law-breaking and violence. These two were great chums of Rowley's, and, naturally enough, needing extra help, they called on him to give it.

The business was planned for the next Sunday evening, when folks were sure to be either in church or out walking. Affairs of this kind were more difficult in summer than in winter, by reason of the

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lengthened daylight; on Sunday evenings, however, it was possible to do quite an amount of "lifting" of a miscellaneous description.

Many were the whispered consultations carried on in the Row, and the details of the expedition were planned with the utmost carefulness by the three conspirators.

Rowley being so much younger than the other two, was not told where the crib was situated which they intended to crack; but by dint of using his wits, and putting to good account every scrap of information that he could lay hands on, he decided that it was one of the houses bordering the Chorley Park, that had been selected as the scene of operation. Jim Craggs had taken to lounging in that direction lately, whilst Tom Smith, who hawked boot-laces and buttons, had remarked, in Rowley's hearing, that he knew how every scullery window in the neighbourhood was fastened.

Somehow, those qualms of conscience that

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Rowley tried so hard to drown, would make themselves felt, in spite of his efforts; and as the eventful Sunday drew near, he grew so uneasy in his mind at the prospect, as to entertain serious thoughts of backing out of the business altogether.

But that was not so easy; at the very first mention of it, Jim Craggs pricked up his ears, deciding that the youngster meant to peach, and promptly resolving to spoil that little game.

"Wot's the matter wi' yer, Rowley, si 'ave yer turned pious?" he asked, with a sinister grin, which had the effect of making Rowley's flesh creep, so well did he know and appreciate the force of Jim's character.

"No, it ain't pious," he retorted, with a feeble attempt at evasion, which Jim was quick to see through; "but I don't feel werry well, sort o' sick and queer, dontcherknow."

"No, I don't," said Tom Smith, who was also present, "an' yer don't come over us jist like that neither, Rowley, my chicken; it's religion wot you're sufferin' from, I knows

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the symptoms. Did Gineral Booth send an' hoffer yer a commission in the hawmy; or is it the curate o' Saint Mark's that 'as taken yer in hand fer the good o' yer soul?"

Rowley simply writhed under this sarcasm, for the waif of the streets is to the full as thin-skinned as his betters; and he cast about in his mind for some other excuse which might be made to serve him at a pinch.

"Now, look 'ere, Rowley File, what are yer up to, si? No sneakin', mind, an' bringin' the bobbies arter us afore we kin si Jack Robinson, or by my grandfather's 'ead yer shall remember it to yer dyin' day;" as he spoke, Jim gripped Rowley by the arms, and shook him fiercely.

Jim was head and shoulders taller than Rowley, and strong in proportion, and the small boy shivered a little as he looked into the angry face of the big fellow, while his courage began to evaporate.

"An' it won't be a werry considerable time before his dyin' day tikes place, if he blabs

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an' settles us in quod," put in Tom Smith, as he struck a match and re-lighted his cigarette, which had been allowed to go out through Tom's anxiety to learn the real reason of Rowley's eleventh-hour repentance.

Rowley's face grew pale behind the freckles; he knew these two chums of his too well not to believe them capable of doing him any evil turn that lay in their power, as a fitting revenge for his desertion of them.

"I ain't a' goin' ter blab," he asserted, with anxious vehemence, stuffing his dirty fists into his eyes, to rub away the tears that were not there.

"Then si yer'll go along ter lend a hand, an' then we shall know as yer ain't thinkin' o' settin' the cops on ter us," commanded Jim, detecting Rowley's dry-eyed grief, and distrusting the sincerity of his purpose.

For one moment Rowley entertained the idea of appealing to his father and mother, that they might use force to keep him from

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going with Jim and Tom. But a very little reflection sufficed to show the futility of such a course; for his father spent a greater portion of his days and nights in petty cadging, and his mother—Sunday being a leisure day with her—was, as a rule, quite too drunk to be appealed to.

"Si yer'll go," demanded Jim, shaking him as a terrier dog might shake a rat.

"Yes-s-s," faltered Rowley, in stammering confusion, his hesitancy bringing him another shake from Jim, and a parting cuff on the ears, that sent him rolling over in the dust.

"An' we'll see as yer does go," said Tom, with a malignant grimace; then he sauntered off with Jim, through the swing-doors of "The Green Acorn," and Rowley was left to his own meditations, which just now did not wear a very sunshiny aspect.

The worst part of it was that he could not understand himself, or his own motives in wishing to draw back. The expedition offered unusual opportunity for plunder, with only a minimum of risk, and Rowley had

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looked forward to it eagerly enough until the day or so before, when the street-preacher's words would keep ringing in his ears, "Thou shalt not steal." Then he had pondered a good deal over what the old gentleman had told him about God's electricity, and was secretly afraid lest some sudden judgment might strike him down, if he ventured to tread in the way of transgressors.

He was still wrapped in his moody meditation, when slap against his cheek came a clammy something with an awful odour, and looking up, he received a similar unsavoury missile full in his mouth.

A burst of delighted laughter betrayed the hiding-place of the delinquents who had dared to pelt him with rotten fish, and with a whoop and a yell, Rowley went off in hot pursuit, intent on making his tormentors smart for their pains.

In the excitement of the chase, he shook off his depression, and having been successful, proceeded to deal out vengeance according to his own ideas of the kind of punishment such an offence merited.

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No one rose early on Sundays, in Paradise Row, in fact, many of the inhabitants slept all through the day, by way of compensation for the dissipations of the previous night, and the place wore a subdued, exhausted air, very different from the turbulent uproar that obtained a few hours before. Rowley spent the morning in amicable play with his brethren of the gutter; and later on, he curled himself up in a comfortable corner and went to sleep.

It was his intention to only feign slumber, for he knew that Jim Craggs and Tom Smith had been keeping a quiet eye on him all day; and he thought if they saw him sleeping they would probably go off to get a little rest on their own account, and then he would be able to get up and sneak away, in which case he would be missing when they wanted him. But, to his annoyance, they also chose that spot for their afternoon lounge, and planted themselves one on either side of him, talking of a fight they had assisted at on the previous night, but showing no desire for slumber.

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With an impatient wriggle or two, Rowley twisted about on the warm ground and finally went off to sleep, arguing that since there seemed no prospect of getting out of the affair, he might as well get what rest he could before starting.

Presently a hand gripped his arm, and he awoke with a start, to find Jim bending over him.

"Come on," he said, with a drag at the arm he held, and Rowley scrambled to his feet, obediently, rubbing his eyes to get the sleep out of them.

Then he recollected that he didn't want to go, and staggered feebly, crying out in a whimpering tone: "I'm bad, ever so bad, I can't walk."

"Cawn't yer, then we'll 'elp yer; here, catch 'old, Jim, atween our lovin' embraces the kid 'll soon revive, an' we've no time ter waste in argifyin'," said Tom Smith, seizing Rowley and marching him off.

Jim caught hold of his other hand, and they dragged him away between them.

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Their destination was a considerable distance from Paradise Row, and as the evening was cloudy, dusk seemed already about them by the time they reached the pleasant neighbourhood surrounding Chorley Park.

The houses were mostly new ones, pretty little villas, but imperfectly secured with bolts and bars, thus affording a happy hunting-ground for burglars.

Jim and Tom had been there before, and knew well the ground to be traversed.

They went down a side street, and entering a narrow alley running between two rows of back gardens, crept cautiously along, until they reached a wooden gate nearly at the end of the alley. This, Jim tried softly, and yielding to a gentle push, it opened and let them in.

There were roses and geraniums in abundance in the little garden, with musk and mignonette creeping over the edges of the flower beds, which, their feet treading upon as they passed, sent up strong, sweet odours on the sultry evening air. Rowley never forgot that perfume with its searching sweetness,

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connecting it, in his thoughts ever after, with that Sunday night's attempt at crib-cracking.

How still it was! The roar and rattle of the streets had sunk to silence, the noise of children's voices in the green reaches of the Park sounded faint and far-away, and the chiming of the church bells was over also.

Cautiously they tried the scullery window; it was fastened, but a dexterous twist from Tom's clever fingers speedily slipped it open, and then seizing Rowley, Jim lifted him up, and put him through the window.

"Look sharp, an' get the door unfastened, we've no time ter lose, for church 'll be out in 'arf an hour," he whispered; and Rowley disappeared to unfasten the bolts of the back door, and let in the other two, whose larger bulk did not admit of their entering by the window.

"Now to bisness. Don't waste time on peekin', tike what comes handiest, an' meet in the pantry for a bit o' supper

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ter finish up with," said Jim, who was leader of the campaign, as he disappeared in the direction of the dining-room, intent on securing the contents of the plate-basket.

Tom directed his attention to the drawing-room, doubtless in search of small valuables that the unsuspecting owners might have left there unsecured; while Rowley wandered away upstairs, curious to see what sort of place it was, and not troubling very much about filling his pockets, until he had thoroughly explored the premises.

He peeped into the various rooms on the upper floor, contrasting their clean comfort with the one poor sordid room that he called home, and wondering that people were not afraid to spoil such white beds by sleeping in them; and then, growing bolder, he ventured to lie down on one, just to see how soft it was.

Absorbed in his exploration, he did not notice how suddenly dark it had grown, for, like his companions, he carried a tiny dark-lantern, which he flashed upon all objects that

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"His eyes fell on a printed card lying close by."—*Page 149.*

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seemed worth inspection; but remembering what Jim had said about supper, he was turning to leave the room, when a slight sound arrested his attention.

It was the subdued ticking of a watch, and a short search revealed it lying on the toilet-table, under a handkerchief and pair of gloves that had been carelessly flung down upon it. It was a lady's gold watch set with brilliants, which gleamed and sparkled in the little shaft of light thrown from Rowley's lantern.

An eager exclamation sprang to his lips, a wave of colour flashed into his pale cheeks, and he stretched out his hand to seize the glittering prize. But even as his fingers closed upon it, his eyes fell on a printed card lying close by, and as he read the words, his hand dropped the watch with a hasty movement as though it had burnt him.

"Thou shalt not steal."

As he stood staring agape at the card, his eyes dilated with fear, a peal of thunder crashed over the house, shaking the windows, and filling the air with a wild confusion of noise and tumult.

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Thoroughly frightened, Rowley started violently, and his lantern dropped from his trembling hands. With a sputtering hiss the light went out, and he was left in the strange darkness of an unfamiliar room.

Only for a moment, however, and then the place was illuminated with the sudden, awful brilliancy of a vivid flash of lightning, which striking across his eyes seemed to half-blind him.

Surely it must be God's electricity invoked to punish him for attempting to steal that shining gold watch; and, terror-stricken by the thought, Rowley could bear no more, but fled from the room screaming with all his might.

"Wot's ter do?" shouted Jim from below, alarmed by this sudden commotion.

"He's comin', He's comin'," shrieked Rowley, his bewildered brain having gathered the impression that the Almighty was about to descend in person, to punish this transgression of His law.

Frightened by the sound of fear in his

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voice, Jim and Tom speedily made off, carrying with them what spoil they could lay hands on.

But Rowley, plunging with reckless haste down the stairs, caught his foot in the carpet, and fell heavily.

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CHAPTER IV.

NEW WAYS.

THE fall stunned him, and he lay for a time unconscious. When he came to himself again he was lying on the floor, with several people standing, and kneeling about him.

He started up in great affright, but the sight of a policeman seemed to go a long way towards re-assuring him.

"Oh, we's nabbed, is we?" he ejaculated with a big sigh of relief; "I wos so afraid, cos I thought it wos the other one, dontcher-know."

"Which other one?" asked a voice behind him, as he lay on the floor.

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Rowley turned in quick amazement, for the tone had a familiar ring.

Yes, it was the preaching woman who knelt there on the floor at his back; and standing beside her, was the old gentleman, with whom he had talked in Saint Mark's churchyard. He could not understand it at all, at least nothing but the policeman, and even that functionary had somehow seemed to alter in character, viewed under the present aspect of things.

"Which other one?" reiterated the preaching woman, when Rowley did not answer.

"That party as owns the 'Land beyond the Flood,' Him, wot has the electricity yer know, and splits things," he answered, looking from one to the other in the vain attempt to make his meaning quite plain to them all.

"Did you think that God was coming?" asked the preaching woman, her voice quivering with emotion.

Rowley nodded, he felt quite too much abased to speak, for the preaching woman

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looked so grand to-night, in her black silk gown, and lace mantle.

"Why were you more afraid of God, than of a policeman?" asked the old gentleman, speaking for the first time.

"Oh, the perlice ain't bad, not when yer's used to 'em; an' bein' in quod ain't bad neither, if it's winter, for the meals is reglar, an' they keeps yer pretty warm," said Rowley, finding his tongue now, and speaking quite freely.

"Have you been in prison, why you are quite a small boy?" asked the preaching woman in a sad tone.

Rowley nodded his head with quite an air of importance. "I've bin run in twice, fourteen days, the larst wos, an' I liked it; oh, prison ain't arf bad. But a party as can crack trees an' chimbleys, an' make it thunder, so as yer can't hear yerself think, why it scares yer rather," said Rowley with a shiver, and an evident desire to apologise for his cowardice.

"Policeman, I do not think you need trouble to stay any longer, thank you," said

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the preaching woman, rising hastily and slipping some silver into the constable's hand.

"But, ma'am, he's one o' the gang I've had my eye on for months past, a reglar lot o' young warmints they be, an' I fancy I can put my finger on the other as helped him in this job," expostulated X 25, in a serious tone.

But the lady only shook her head, saying pleasantly: "We do not want to prosecute the boy, and I do not fancy he will give you much trouble in future."

"I'm none so sure o' that," retorted the constable with a grim shake of his head. "You mean it kind, but that sort don't understand kindness, it's clean wasted on 'em, and they turns round on you all the more, because they think you're soft, begging your pardon of course, for mentioning such a thing."

But the lady shook her head still, while the old gentleman smiled and answered for her:

"Never mind, we will look after him, and I don't think he will steal again, policeman,

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not now that my wife has taken him in hand."

Rowley lay quite still until the door had closed upon the policeman, and then he slowly gathered himself up into a sitting posture, for he was not hurt, only stunned, and shaken by the fall.

"Does it mean that I'm not ter be sent ter quod?" he asked, staring round him in vague surprise.

"Yes, that is what it means, boy, are you sorry?" asked the old gentleman with a touch of sharpness in his tone.

"I dunno," he replied, not quite re-assured; he had never had to do with people like this before, and the very unfamiliarity made him suspicious, and ill at ease.

"You sell papers, don't you?" asked the preaching woman, who understood better than her husband, what was passing in the boy's mind.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied promptly, adding, with an eye to business; "an' I'll be glad ter supply yer reglar, if yer'll give me an order."

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"Very well, you can bring *The Times* up every morning, it will give me an opportunity of seeing how you are getting on; but you must not steal again, nor even attempt to take what is not your own: you have felt God's power in your heart, and you know that sin is hateful in His sight."

"I'd not dare ter go against Him now," murmured Rowley, with such awe in his tone, that the preaching woman felt satisfied that the lesson of the night would not be wholly lost upon this waif of the streets.

Nor was it. For many weeks and months after that eventful Sunday evening, Rowley appeared with clock-like regularity, to bring his morning paper; and every day his eyes looked straight into the face of the preaching woman, and she knew, without asking, that he was keeping his word to her.

* * * * *

But that was eight years ago. Rowley is grown up now, and no longer lives in Paradise Row. Indeed the Row no longer exists, having been swept away, in the onward

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march of improvement, and the new board schools with their spacious playgrounds, occupy the site of the squalid tenements, where Rowley had his youthful home.

Eight years! And what a number of changes they had brought about. Jim Craggs was dead, killed by a fall from a roof, when trying to escape from a pursuing policeman; and Tom Smith was wheeling barrows, and wielding a pick, for the good of his country, at Dartmoor; but Rowley had obtained a situation at the newspaper shop, by the railway arch, and was looked upon as a useful and respectable member of society.

When he obtained that situation, he gained also another advantage, which the years had taught him to prize; and that was, the privilege of making his home with the preaching woman and her husband.

The old gentleman had become a great invalid, the infirmities of old age had gathered fast about him, and he was a helpless prisoner on his bed, saving when Rowley's strong young arms lifted him from thence to his couch, or

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on fine, sunshiny days, to his bath-chair. The old invalid when he took the air in this fashion, liked best to be drawn to the churchyard of Saint Mark's, where the lightning-blasted tree still stood, one half living, and clothed in its season with verdant foliage, the other half, dead, and cursed, over which even the ivy refused to climb.

Rowley liked to go there too, for the old tree had stood to him often, as a safeguard from temptation, during the hard years of his upward struggle.

The preaching woman had ceased her active ministrations for the good of others, and under the shadow of heavy bodily affliction, waited in calm patience for the call that should summon her to the "Land beyond the Flood."

But Rowley had taken the work that fell from her enfeebled fingers, and spent his leisure time, as she had done, in preaching in the streets. And his audiences felt that he was worth listening to, since his feet had trod the self-same path of poverty and pain, as theirs were doomed to tread. He knew his

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power over the mob and used it well, and when at the last day, earth's labour receives its reward in heaven, many will gather in the fair regions of the "Land beyond the Flood," who learned the way thither from the lips of Rowley File.

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